Cuts Unscene: Hannibal, Season 1

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Cuts Unscene: Hannibal, Season 1

by DBMars

Summary

What if there had been a sex scene in every episode of the original HANNIBAL series? What if Will and Hannibal had been intimate all along, beginning with the pilot episode?

I set out to answer that question. Cuts Unscene is the result.

In this companion fic to your next re-watch, Will and Hannibal have some kind of intimate interaction in every episode that builds their romantic connection. These "deleted sex scenes" operate on the concept that they were actual scenes cut from the original episodes. I attempted to make them fit into the plot in ways that are were as canon-compliant as possible.

For an optimal experience, watch the episode, then pause it at the indicated timestamp and read the "deleted scene" before pressing play again :) Not necessary, but definitely a good time. It adds an extra subtext to certain scenes that make for a richer viewing experience.

As always, Bon Appétit, and hannigram forever.

Notes

Companion Song: "Paralyzed" — the Cardigans

"This is where your sanity gives in / and love begins..."

This "cut unscene" begins at 28:12, about an hour after Will and Hannibal meet in Jack's office. In the previous scene, Will flounced out of the room after feeling "psychoanalyzed" by Hannibal and demanding to know whose profile Hannibal is really working on. "You wouldn't like me when I'm psychoanalyzed!"

Season 1 Episode 1: Apéritif

Will checked his watch. He'd been waiting in the courtyard outside the FBI Academy in Quantico for just over an hour. Skulking, really – he leaned against the low edge of a raised flower bed, shoulders hunched, eyes on the glass double doors, carefully monitoring the building's comings and goings. He didn't have much time left. It was a miracle none of his students hadn't spotted him yet and wandered over to talk about his latest lecture. Will could think of nothing he'd enjoy less.

"Stupid," he muttered to himself, pulling off his glasses for a moment and rubbing them on his shirt, an automatic gesture he often relied on when he didn't know what to do with his hands. What the hell was he doing? This was a bad idea and a waste of time.

Just as he stood to leave, Hannibal Lecter exited the double doors, briefcase in one hand, his tan blazer draped over the other arm in anticipation of the warm afternoon. Will felt his heart take a great, desperate leap, like a deer vaulting over a fence to flee a hunter. Dr. Lecter moved past him, headed for the parking lot. Will fought his urge to turn and scurry off in the other direction. *Just do it!* he thought. *You've been standing out here for an hour, just do it already.*

"Dr. Lecter," he called.

Lecter turned, his faint brows rising gently in a look of mild surprise. "Mr. Graham," he greeted, turning and moving closer. Will forced himself forward until they stood face to face.

"Took you awhile," Will said, shifting uncomfortably and averting his gaze. "You and Jack must have had a lot to talk about."

"Naturally. This is a very intricate case."

"If my ears are red it's because they've been burning," Will said, then internally slapped himself.

But Dr. Lecter just gave him a slight smile. "Yes, we talked about you, but the conversation was brief. I can assure you I'm not here to pick you apart any more than is necessary. I'm sorry if–"

"Don't apologize. Apologies *needle* me," Will blurted before he could stop himself, but to his surprise, again, Dr. Lecter seemed immune to his rudeness.

"I wouldn't like you when you're being apologized to," the doctor joked gently.

"Yeah," Will said with a small, relieved laugh. When he risked a look at Lecter's face, he saw the doctor's open but questioning expression. "Um, so, I was waiting for–" he took a breath, tried again. "What are you doing now?"

Dr. Lecter's head cocked ever so slightly to one side. "I was headed back to my office."

"Appointments?"

"Just paperwork," Dr. Lecter said. "May I ask why?"

"I was wondering if you wanted to get a drink." It came out rushed, like water breaching a dam. And with that, he was rambling. "Jack says I'm not sociable. And he's right, it's difficult for me. So

this is – this is me being sociable." He took a breath and waited impatiently for Lecter to respond. The doctor did not speak immediately. Did he just want to watch Will squirm? "That's what people do, isn't it? Go out for drinks after work with their coworkers?"

"Many do," Dr. Lecter said at last. The moment stretched out between them, absolute torture. "Where would you like to go?" he asked, and again relief flooded Will's body.

"I know a place in Baltimore. That's where you're located, right?"

Lecter nodded.

"I'm parked over there." He indicated his silver Volvo wagon where it sat in the nearby parking lot. "If you want to follow me."

"Very well."

Will didn't know what facial expression Dr. Lecter held, too afraid to look in case there was eye contact again. "See you there," he said hurriedly and walked to his car, trying not to look like he was in a rush.

Traffic was light, and in an hour Will pulled into a curbside spot half a block from their destination. Lecter parked as well and met him on the sidewalk, and they walked in silence up to the bar's narrow door. Will glanced back as they stepped in, just to make sure Lecter was following him, and caught the doctor's eyes unintentionally. They gleamed red for a moment in the neon light of the window sign bearing the name of the place – The Crawdad Hole. Will looked away quickly and pushed through the after-work crowd to a corner table, his usual seat in the small, dingy establishment.

Lecter sat across from him in the booth, glancing at their surroundings, taking in the taxidermy fish trophies, beer signs, outdated TVs, and decorative shrimp nets that hung from the ceiling. "You're a regular here," he said, a statement, not a question.

"I come by whenever I'm in town," Will replied, simultaneously put off by and impressed with Lecter's keen observations.

"It appeals to you. Like coming home," Lecter said.

Will started, then pushed his glasses up higher on his nose, a defensive maneuver. "How did you know I was from Louisiana?"

"I didn't. Not until now," Lecter said. Will risked a look at his face and was met with an infuriating smile, pleasant but undeniably smug.

They were interrupted by the appearance of the buxom waitress, who greeted Will warmly. "Hi honey, good to see you again. And you brought a friend, that's a first." She beamed down at them with lips painted a vibrant, imperial pink. "The usual?"

"Uh, yeah."

"Got it. How 'bout you, *meenoo*?"

Lecter's smile widened for a brief moment at the woman's Cajunism. "May I see the wine list?"

"I got it memorized, sugar. House red or house white?"

"Red, please. Thank you."

The waitress turned back to Will. "Want me to toss some gator bites in the fryer for ya?"

"Not tonight." Will shook his head, a brief motion, eyes on the table in front of him.

"*Si bon*. I'll be right back." She left with a clicking of heels on the bar's pockmarked hardwood floors, barely audible over the Zydeco music piping through the place.

"You prefer to eat predators, I see," Lecter commented. Will avoided his gaze again, looking instead at the doctor's blazer, the intricate but obvious stitching that marked a designer garment. "Though battered and fried, it hardly bears a resemblance to the creature anymore."

"Like you said. Reminds me of home."

Lecter did not reply, but Will could feel his dark eyes as if his gaze were a touch, light but ever present. The waitress brought their drinks, putting a glass of wine in front of Lecter and giving Will a Bells Two-Hearted ale and a double shot of whiskey. He drained the shot immediately and then sipped the beer. "Well?" he asked, irritation bleeding into his voice.

"I'm waiting for you to continue. This is being sociable, isn't it? We're getting to know each other," Lecter said, with that same annoying mildness.

"And you're getting more information for your profile." Will sighed, and took another long drink of his beer. "Right, yeah. I'm from Louisiana."

"No one would know it from your speech," Lecter said, leaning forward slightly. "It's not that you tried to get rid of your accent, but more that you pick up the vocal patterns of those around you."

Will nodded. "If I went home, I'm sure it'd come back."

"And where is home?"

"Little town outside of Lafayette." Will shifted uncomfortably in his seat and took another drink as Lecter waited patiently. "Let's see, what would a profiler need to know? My mom left when I was five and my dad raised me, if you want to call it that. The family business was boat motors. I was left alone a lot, which has obviously resulted in some antisocial tendencies. I spent my time playing in the swamp. Fishing and studying insects mostly."

"Ah, insects," Lecter said, raising the wine to his nose. He inhaled deeply as Will watched, studying his expression. A flicker of distaste crossed Lecter's features, but he raised the glass to his lips, parting them slightly to allow the wine into his mouth, a cursory taste. Will watched his throat as he swallowed, but looked away quickly as Lecter saw him watching. "Your interest in entomology was revisited later in your life. Jack told me you wrote a very astute monograph for the standard time of death by insect activity. Were you always interested in decomposition?"

"That's a weird question to ask somebody," Will said curtly.

"It's a weird interest to have," Lecter replied with another of those damnable smooth little smiles that crinkled the edges of his eyes just so.

"I was a homicide detective in New Orleans, but, ah... I found myself... more drawn to forensics." Will signaled the waitress and she returned to collect his empty glass and nodded with a cheerful smile when he asked for another one. He hoped Lecter wouldn't pry any further. Will had no interest in explaining to this almost-complete stranger why he'd really left NOLA PD.

"Insects and corpses don't require one to be sociable." Yet another on-the-nose observation, delivered as an irrefutable statement. Lecter's confidence was halfway between irksome and oddly alluring. "Working homicide requires interviewing witnesses, victims, perpetrators – forming a connection with them, getting them to trust you. That must have been difficult."

"Yeah, I was more at home with the bugs." Will drained his beer and sipped the whiskey this time, though it was far from good. The warmth spread through his abdomen and loosened his tongue. *One more drink,* he thought, *and I might be able to look at his eyes for more than a second. Talk about distracting.*

"You're fond of animals. More fond of them than people I expect."

Damn it, I'm being read like a book. A children's book, it's that easy.

"And what makes you say that?" he challenged the doctor.

Lecter tried his wine again, but didn't take more than a small mouthful. "When you visited Elise Nichols' house, you asked about the cat."

Will sighed, defeated. "Yes. But I'm a dog person." Irritated, he twisted in his seat. "Lurlene? Can I get another beer please?" He turned back to Lecter, further nettled by the doctor's self-satisfied posture. "How about you, Dr. Lecter? I think it's time you were a little more *sociable*. Let's see, your accent – Baltic, right?"

Lecter's fingers played with the stem of the cheap wine glass. "Correct. Please, continue. I wouldn't expect you to silence your observational skills and analytical mind."

"Jack said he saw a picture of your boarding school in your office," Will went on as Lurlene approached with another bottle of beer. "So your family was well-off. You don't strike me as the delinquent type, so it's not like you were sent away for bad behavior."

"You don't think me capable of bad behavior?" Will braved a look at Lecter's eyes and saw they sparkled with humor. This time, he didn't want to look away, so he didn't.

Handsome, he thought, then adamantly told his brain to shut it.

An unexpected warmth rose to his cheeks and he removed his glasses awkwardly, setting them on the table. "I'm sure you are. No, you definitely are – but you're too smart to get caught. So the stint in boarding school wasn't punitive. Let me guess, family tradition? Were you a, what's the word – a legacy?"

"All correct so far, Will." Will liked the way Lecter said his name. It wasn't just the accent. It was some kind of longing inflection.

"See? Two can play at this game."

"You think this is a game?" Lecter's finger traced the outer rim of his glass, the wine in it forgotten.

"No, no," Will laughed after another drink of ale. "No, it's *your* turn. We're talking about you, so don't ask me questions."

"My lips are sealed," Lecter said, and Will successfully resisted the urge to look directly at them. Instead, he leaned back and fumbled with the buttons of his cuffs before rolling his forest-green shirtsleeves up to his elbows.

Lurlene stopped by and set a basket of popcorn on the table between them, giving Lecter an obvious once-over. "Not gonna introduce me to your friend, huh?" she asked.

Will chuckled. "Lurlene, this is Dr. Lecter."

"Hannibal, please." He reached out and she folded her long-nailed fingers into his grip for a brief squeeze.

"That's an interesting name. Are you from Missouri?" Lurlene asked.

Will laughed, louder than he meant to, then leaned on his hand to cover his mouth. Lecter was too polite, though Will could feel – as any empath worth his salt could – that the doctor was as amused as he was. In fact, as the evening had passed, he'd been able to pick up more and more from Lecter, as if he was letting little pieces of his guard down.

"No," Dr. Lecter replied. "I've never been there."

"Not a fan of the house red, huh?" Lurlene motioned to the untouched wine, then shrugged apologetically. "Can I get ya somethin' else, honey?"

"Fix him a Sazerac," Will suggested. Lecter nodded and Lurlene went back to the bar, taking Lecter's wine glass with her.

Lecter raised a hand to brush his hair across his forehead. Will made inadvertent eye contact after watching him do so. "It's Hannibal for you as well, if you'd like, Will."

"Sure. Where did you get that name, anyway?"

"It runs in the family."

Will crossed his arms and leaned back as Lurlene returned with the new drink, setting down another whiskey for him, even though he hadn't asked for it.

"That's right. We were talking about your family. So you followed tradition and went to boarding school in... Paris."

Lecter seemed genuinely surprised. "Jack told you."

Will grinned, shaking his head. "He didn't. But I will admit I read your paper on the evolutionary origins of social exclusion. And even though you wrote it in English, it had Parisian stamped all over it. You had to have spent your formative years there. Only the French – specifically Parisians – are as... deliberate and exacting as you are with language. Must've been tough, writing in English. We have so few words."

Now that he'd had a few drinks, his own words came easily, as did the eye contact. As much as Will had been sure this social obligation would be a chore, he was actually enjoying himself. And kudos

to Hannibal for not fleeing at the sight of a place called The Crawdad Hole that served gator bites, which had been Will's backup plan for wiggling out of his self-imposed socialization.

"What I mean is," he continued, "English is just... inexact. It's hard to find the perfect word for things, specifically abstract concepts. Like love. I can love a person, I can love my dogs, and I can love fishing, but I don't love them in the same way. Yet I'm forced to use the same damned word. It lacks... nuance."

"English is frustrating for the exact reasons you mention," Hannibal said after taking an exploratory drink of his Sazerac, and approving of it with a nod. "Love is hard enough to describe without lacking words."

"But I was right about Paris, wasn't I?" Will tipped his beer bottle slightly in Hannibal's direction, raising a caustic eyebrow.

Hannibal laughed softly. "Yes, Will. You were."

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"So I went into the bathroom to wash my face," Will said after draining his latest beer. "And I'm in there, and-and Jack Crawford follows me in and starts giving me this hard ass lecture about 'being in the saddle"... and then Phillips walks in. I mean, the guy's already unzipping his fly, and Crawford turns around and just *bellows* at him, 'USE THE LADIES' ROOM!'"

They laughed together. "And he tucked himself back in, zipped up, and ran out of there, I swear to God." Will dragged the heel of his hand over one eye, wiping away a tear of merriment. "There's a lawsuit waiting to happen. *Tattlecrime* would love that – I can see the headline now: 'Head of the Behavioral Science Unit orders agent to spy on women in the toilet'."

"Don't tell me you actually read *Tattlecrime*, Will." Hannibal leaned back and drained his own glass. "Trash like that will rot your brain. And Jack and I – we need your brain very fresh."

Lurlene approached, the check in hand. "I hate to do it, boys, but we're closin' up. Y'all gotta get a move on."

"You don't have to go home, but you can't stay here," Will sang softly under his breath, then scoffed at how it sounded.

"Thank you for the excellent service, Lurlene." Hannibal pulled out an expensive-looking wallet – Will guessed Italian leather – and handed her a black credit card.

"No, no, let me get it – I asked you..." Will protested.

"It's my pleasure, Will." Hannibal released the card into Lurlene's fuchsia-tipped fingers.

Minutes later, they were out on the street. Will shivered as the wind picked up, chasing away the day's warmth. They paused next to the Volvo. "Well... this is me." Will fumbled for his keys and dropped them. Bending over, he lost his balance, but Hannibal was there, taking him by the forearm and shoulder and guiding him back up. Will's skin felt like fire where they touched bare flesh.

"You shouldn't drive," Hannibal said.

"Shit," Will sighed. "I guess not."

"I don't live far from here," Hannibal told him, releasing his arm at last. Will glanced down at his forearm, almost believing he would see a red mark in the shape of a hand. There wasn't one, of course, but the outline still radiated a warmth he hadn't felt in a long time. "You can sober up, and then I'll bring you back to your car when you're able to drive to Wolf Trap."

"I don't want to... impose," Will made himself say, because it seemed like the kind of thing one should say in this situation, not because he had even a shred of hesitation. The last thing he wanted was for the evening to end. This realization was immediate and blinding, but it felt *good*. Right. He had to admit he'd enjoyed himself. And he hadn't thought about Elise Nichols or pictured her corpse for the last couple of hours, which was a welcome respite from the kaleidoscope of horror that usually spun in his head.

"Not at all. Please, I must insist." Hannibal took Will by the arm again for a moment to encourage him to cross the street toward the doctor's gleaming black Bentley. Hannibal's fingers only touched the cloth of his shirt this time, a disappointment.

"I'm calling in sick tomorrow, I don't know about you," Will said lightly as they got in, trying to regulate his breathing. Hannibal was wickedly observant, and it wouldn't take much for Will to give his feelings away.

"It's tempting," Hannibal said as he turned on the engine and pulled out into the scanty traffic. "I have a difficult patient as my first appointment of the day. Very neurotic. And a crier."

Will laughed under his breath. "Definitely cancel, then." He rested his head on his hand, elbow on the window ledge, and watched the city slide by, lights in the night, the stars obscured by the orange haze of street lamps.

Very soon, it seemed, Will was seated on the sofa in front of a fireplace in Hannibal's shadowy but impressive home, looking into the glass eyes of a taxidermy antelope affixed to the wall above the mantle. The way the warm brown spheres reflected the soft lighting were reminiscent of Hannibal's eyes, though they lacked the sharp, insistent life the doctor's reflected.

Hannibal returned from the sideboard with two glasses of amber liquid, handing him one. "You seem to have no trouble making eye contact with my friend there," he observed with soft amusement.

Will raised the glass to his lips, then paused. "I thought I was supposed to be sobering up," he said.

Hannibal inhaled the liquor's scent and took a sip. "This whiskey is Japanese. I thought you'd like to try it. It's made in an area with a terrain much like Scotland. The water used is some of the purest in the world. It's gained quite a reputation in the last ten years." He paused, studying Will carefully. "But you're right. I'll make you a coffee."

"No," Will said, a little too quickly. Hannibal lowered himself back into his seat as Will took a fiery mouthful of spirit. "That's incredible," he complimented, and Hannibal smiled knowingly.

They passed a strangely comfortable silence. Will slid into a state of pleasant exhaustion, warmed by the fire and the whiskey.

"Now that I have you to myself, and your tongue's been loosened," Hannibal began, and Will looked at him with a sudden swell of panic and hope before he finished his sentence, "I'd like to know what you think about Jack Crawford."

"Jack?" Will blinked in surprise, then looked at the flames, trying to coalesce his thoughts. "Good at his job, though I'm not fond of the whole "evil minds museum" thing. Much more involved than the last head of Behavioral Science, that's for sure. He's not afraid to get out in the field, from what I've heard. Certainly not afraid to roar at people in the restroom." They shared a subdued laugh. "For as tough as he is, I've heard he's a very devoted husband. I've never met his wife, but the water cooler gossip is that she's incredibly beautiful. People don't understand how Jack caught her."

"Confidence can be a powerful aphrodisiac," Hannibal remarked, moving easily to the sideboard again and returning with a different bottle of whiskey, silently urging Will to try this one as well. The liquid whispered against the crystal of their glasses. "He roars. Some people love a lion." He paused, looking at Will over the rim of his glass, then lowered it. "But you're a dog person." Hannibal's lips met the crystal again. Then he asked, "Are you seeing anyone?"

Will felt a tremor go through his body, centering around his tenderest areas. He knew he was blushing and hoped the lighting was dim enough that Hannibal wouldn't notice. "Ah, no," he said. Then, "You?"

"No," Hannibal said.

They both drained their glasses in the heavy silence.

"Which one do you like better?" Hannibal asked.

Will raised a trembling hand to his forehead to brush away the gentle sheen of perspiration that had formed there. He ran his fingers through his curls nervously. "Uhm," he stuttered. "I mean – men and women both bring something different to the table, I suppose, so I don't know – apples to oranges..."

Hannibal raised one corner of his mouth and sat back on his end of the sofa, crossing his ankle over his knee. "I meant the whiskey," he said.

"Oh," Will managed even as his breath died in his lungs, murdered by his mortification. "The first one."

"I prefer the second. Let's try them again. I'm sure you'll see it my way."

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"It's a great antelope," Will said, doing his best not to slide his words together.

"I'll tell you a secret," Hannibal said, leaning closer – had they gotten closer together? "It's fake. Constructed of cow hide and carved wood. Please, discretion."

"I won't say a word. Here, I'll tell you a secret too." Will took a drink and then dotted his sleeve against his mouth. "I stole a dog."

Hannibal raised his brows. "From where?"

"Well, I found him running on the road the other night. He had a collar with a piece of broken rope attached to it. I mean, clearly, he belonged to someone, but anyone who ties up a dog like that shouldn't have a pet. Besides, the vet said he wasn't micro-chipped. So now he's mine."

"How villainous," Hannibal said, but with a glimmer of humor. "What have you named him?"

"Winston."

"English bulldog?"

Will chuckled. "No."

"So not named for Churchill, then."

"No," Will told him. "No, he was all alone – like a lone wolf. So then it came to me. I was thinking about Winston Wolf, Harvey Keitel's character from *Pulp Fiction*. The fixer. The person you call when you have a lot of blood to clean up."

"Ah, if only he weren't fictional," Hannibal said. "His services seem advantageous."

From somewhere in the recesses of the house, a clock chimed, echoing through the shadowy silence. Will looked at his watch. "Shit, it's three in the morning. You better start that coffee now."

"Will," Hannibal said, somehow making his name both apologetic and tender. "It's very late. Perhaps you should sleep here."

"I can't," he said immediately, getting to his feet after putting down his glass with a clatter. "I really shouldn't." The world swam around the edges. Will realized in a sudden sinking sensation how drunk he still was, maybe even worse than when they left The Crawdad Hole.

"I'm afraid you must." Hannibal rose as well. "After our whiskey flight, it seems I don't trust myself behind the wheel."

"Just, uh, point me to the couch," Will suggested, his tongue stealing over his lip where the shadow of the last whiskey still remained.

"Nonsense. Come with me."

Will had no choice but to follow him through the exquisitely decorated home, up the stairs and into a gray-paneled bedroom with a stunning cobalt blue ceiling and large bed. "The washroom is through there," Hannibal told him, pointing to the en-suite bath.

"You're the consummate host," Will said hazily. The bed looked too comfortable to resist. He kicked off his shoes and let himself stretch out on it, face against the pillow.

"May I bring you anything else before I retire?" Hannibal asked. Will turned his head dreamily to see Hannibal stripping off his blazer, hanging it carefully in the closet. His befuddled thoughts tried to ask the question: *why would you keep your clothes in the guest bedroom?*

The pillow beneath his cheek carried a heady scent that was both delicate and masculine. Will inhaled deeply. "Your sheets smell... so good..." Realization seeped slowly into his impaired mind. Rising up on his knees, he moved to the edge of the bed. Hannibal was just standing there, watching him, hands in his trouser pockets, head slightly cocked in a posture of mild interest. Perhaps amusement. He was just out of arm's reach, but stepped closer as Will beckoned. Will dared to put his hands on Hannibal's shoulders and lean in, closer to his neck, inhaling. "It's you," he breathed, moving back, dropping his grip. "This is your bed."

"Only the best for such a visitor," Hannibal said. Will felt, in the same part of him that was able to reconstruct grisly murders, the part of him that suffered his unadulterated empathy, that Hannibal

meant something far more than what he said. The pull of wanting to understand him was, in an abrupt moment, totally magnetic.

Before Will registered what he was doing, he put his hands back on Hannibal's shoulders and pulled him closer, shocking them both by pressing their lips together for a long moment.

Hannibal pulled back, out of his grasp, but gently. "You've taken quite a risk." But even as he said it, the calm veneer of civility cracked, ready to shatter, and Will knew it.

"It wasn't a risk," he argued, voice low, throaty. "I know you wanted me to do that."

"Reading me like one of your killers?"

Will nodded, lips parted, heart racing.

"What else do I want from you?" Hannibal asked, moving forward with an aching slowness, back within reach.

Will put a hand behind the bow of Hannibal's back and drew him forward again, and ran the back of his knuckles down Hannibal's smooth, cool cheek. "This," he said. "And this." He put his arms around Hannibal's neck and kissed him, harder this time. It took a short stretch before he felt Hannibal's body relax, and his mouth open to receive the touch of Will's tongue, and to return the kiss in kind.

Will angled his mouth away and moved it down Hannibal's throat until he was blocked by the shirt collar, then back up to his lips again. They paused, sharing breath. Will found Hannibal's hands on him now, emitting a heat that seemed to burn through his clothing. "I was right, wasn't I?" he whispered.

"Yes," Hannibal admitted.

Before Will could have a moment to appreciate his victory, Hannibal pushed him back onto the bed and arched over him, working a knee between Will's thighs and bending in to kiss him again. Piece by piece, the suave self-control chipped away as Hannibal groped him with a sudden fierce possession, pausing only to pull off his sweater and toss it on the end of the bed. Will fumbled with the buttons on Hannibal's crisp white shirt, unable to see them as Hannibal put his mouth against Will's neck, grazing it with his teeth between kisses, exploratory, harmless bites. Finally, Will managed the last button with hurried, drunken fingers.

Hannibal sat back, breathing hard, quickly opening his cuffs and pulling the fabric away from his body. Will couldn't resist putting his fingers in the expanse of soft chest hair. Hannibal caught one of his hands, and brought it to his mouth, kissing his knuckles gently. "You're starved," he said, "for touch."

"So are you," Will managed through his rapidly escalating breaths. "At least in the way you want to be touched."

"It's not the way. It's *who*." Hannibal leaned over him again, working on the buttons of Will's shirt now with a reclaimed air of restraint as Will attempted to undo his belt. Will sat up suddenly and pushed Hannibal on his back, aware that Hannibal was allowing him to do so. He was surprisingly muscular for a psychiatrist, and Will found himself wanting to find out who would overpower

whom. Instead, he hurriedly worked on Hannibal's belt buckle and freed him from the bottom half of his clothing in a few effective if ungraceful moves.

He opened his mouth and bent over, but Hannibal stopped him, a hand on his arm. "Will."

"This is what you want." He said it with firm confidence, because he knew it was right.

"Of course I do. But what kind of host would I be?"

Will laughed disbelievingly as Hannibal pulled him back down and reversed their positions again. His vision went watercolor as he reclined on the sweet-smelling pillows and closed his eyes, feeling Hannibal undress him. Then there was nothing but the incredible warmth of a willing mouth, tongue, touches of teeth that might have been accidental or deliberate, there was no way to know. Will couldn't stop the low moan that built in his chest escaping his mouth, his hands grasping desperately at the bedclothes.

Despite any hindrance caused by the whiskey, he came quickly, hard, every nerve in his body enveloped in delicious fire, sparks feathering in the dark behind his eyelids. As the pleasure ebbed, it was replaced by an all-consuming fatigue fueled by complete bodily satisfaction. He opened his eyes to the cobalt ceiling, breaths slowly lengthening, but his eyelids were immensely heavy. He felt Hannibal slide up next to him, pulling a soft blanket around them. Will folded himself into Hannibal's arms on pure instinct, feeling safe, enveloped, but impossibly drowsy.

"Sleep, Will," Hannibal whispered, breath caressing his ear.

"What about you?" he murmured as Hannibal spooned him from behind. The position made clear the outline of Hannibal's unrelease pressing against his backside.

"You can host next time," Hannibal told him, lips against his temple now.

"Are – you sure?"

"Sleep, Will," Hannibal insisted, stroking Will's hair back from his damp forehead.

Just as unconsciousness sank in its claws, Hannibal spoke again. "Tell me," he said, "when you enter the minds of murderers, when you've seen what they've done and why they've done it – when you empathize with them – what is it like?"

Will was half in a dream, standing in a stream, watching the silhouette of a stag as it crossed the river against the dawn. Dreamily, he replied, "Sometimes it's awful."

Hannibal kissed his shoulder, a gentle press of lips. "And other times?"

"It's beautiful," Will breathed, and fell asleep.

***

I'm in bed next to someone, Will realized as he floated slowly toward consciousness. He opened his eyes, but all he saw was velvet darkness. Turning, the figure of a girl in a white nightgown swam into his vision. It was Elise Nichols, staring blankly ahead. He didn't need to touch her to know her skin was cold. She was dead.

Blood suddenly soaked through the virginal white nightgown, staining her abdomen. Slowly, the bloodstained antlers of a stag protruded as if the animal was under the bed they shared. Elise turned her head and looked at him with her glassy, unseeing eyes.

"There's a monster in the bed," she whispered.

"Will. Wake up. Wake up, Will."

Hands on him, warm, not corpse-cold. Will started and shot up at the waist, his eyes open at last. Breathing heavily, he rubbed his face with his hands and pushed back his sweat-dampened hair.

There was someone in the bed. It wasn't Elise Nichols, but it was still a shock. Hannibal Lecter propped himself up on his elbow and put a concerned hand on Will's arm. "You were dreaming. A nightmare?"

"Y-yeah." Will flinched away from Hannibal's touch, shaking his head as if that would help clear his mind's eye. Heart racing, his gaze darted around the room. There were his clothes, folded neatly on the cushioned bench at the end of the bed. Hannibal's outfit from the night before was nowhere in sight, but there was a sketchbook on the end table, a pencil balanced nearby. The paper bore an intricate portrait of Will's sleeping face.

"The coffee will be ready soon," Hannibal said, sitting up next to him. He'd pulled on a burgundy robe made of some kind of silky material, but it hung open to his navel. The sight brought back the events of the previous night and Will felt panic rising in his throat.

"I – I have to go," Will heard himself say as a headache climbed up and perched behind his eyes. He rubbed his face a moment, then slid quickly to the edge of the bed, grabbing his clothes. "I have to get home. I should have – I need to let the dogs out. And I have a lecture in..." he looked at his watch, "three hours."

"I canceled my morning appointments," Hannibal said, sitting upright as Will stood to buckle his belt and find his shoes. "Let me make you breakfast."

"I can't. I have to go. This is, ah – it's not a good time."

Hannibal did not speak, and the silence felt like a bruise. As Will shakily put on his glasses, Hannibal said, "Give me a moment. I'll drive you back to your car."

"I'll take a cab," Will said sharply, pausing to run his fingers through his hair again. "I'm – I'm sorry, but I really – I can't do *this*." He gestured to himself, then Hannibal, in turn. "I can't do this," he repeated. His heart stumbled in his chest, pulled between a sweet ache for Hannibal and the pure terror of intimacy.

Hannibal got out of bed and re-tied the robe so it covered him completely. "I see." Though his expression did not change, ice dripped from his soft words.

"And – we shouldn't tell–"

"Discretion is important for both of us." Hannibal cut him off. It was the first time Will had ever heard him interrupt someone.

"Let's just... keep it professional, okay?" Will grabbed his phone from the nightstand and shoved it in his pocket. "We're going to be working together. People's lives are on the line. We have a murderer to catch. So just... let's just pretend this didn't happen."

"Of course."

Will paused, his hand on the doorknob. "I'm sorry," he said softly over his shoulder.

Hannibal's dusky eyes had no light in them. "No apologies," he said. Then, life returned to them as he smiled, "We'll have breakfast together another time."

And... CUT.

Now, start the episode again. Pay special attention to the "protein scramble" scene and enjoy the new subtext of everything Hannibal and Will say to one another, every glance, every smile. Looks like they did get to have breakfast together eventually.

Stay tuned!

Season 1 Episode 2: Amuse Bouche

Chapter Summary

Will has just admitted he liked killing Garret Jacob Hobbs. He is overcome with guilt, but Hannibal is there to help ground him in reality. In the power of the moment, Will kisses him again. Hannibal welcomes him back into his bed, provided he stick around longer this time.

Chapter Notes

Companion Song: "Human" —Of Monsters and Men

"Eat me like a cannibal... breathe in, breathe out / Let the human in ... if I lose control / I feed the beast within..."

This "cut unscene" begins at the very end of the episode, continuing the conversation between Hannibal and Will, just after Will admits that he liked killing Garret Jacob Hobbs. Hannibal says, "Killing must feel good to God, too. He does it all the time. And are we not created in his image?" They briefly discuss the church roof falling on faithful parishioners in Texas. Will asks if Hannibal thinks that the act made God feel good. Hannibal responds...

"He felt powerful," Hannibal said.

Will's breath caught in his lungs, escaping in ragged bursts, his stomach churning. Sweat gathered at his hairline and slicked his palms. He felt trapped in Hannibal's gaze, sinking into dark waters. The ambient pulse in his mind crept up to his consciousness, sweeping away what he saw with his eyes and crumbling his vision, replacing it with what his mind demanded he behold.

Will saw himself as though he was an impartial observer tucked in the corner of the Hobbs family kitchen, watching as the other Will stumbled into the room, gun raised. The blood from Abigail's neck opened slowly like a flower greeting the sun, kissing her face. With the cold precision of an emotionless onlooker, he watched himself shoot Hobbs, watched Hobbs fall, watched the other Will clumsily try to stop the life from gushing out of Abigail's throat.

"See?" Hobbs whispered to the other Will. Then he turned, and looked directly at Will the bystander, the version of himself that sat in the profiler's mental seat. "See?" he repeated.

"I see," Will said. It was horrifically clear. He understood Hobbs completely now. And the copycat and all the other monsters he'd chased his entire life. He saw.

It felt good. And it was beautiful.

"Will?" Hannibal's voice floated to him as if from miles away. "Will, are you all right?"

"*See*?" Garret Jacob Hobbs asked him again, appearing now as his corpse must have looked on the autopsy table, cloudy-eyed and pale.

"Will, I need you to breathe." Hannibal's voice tugged at him.

"I don't want to see," he snarled at Hobbs' animated corpse, which was slowly rising to its feet in the bloodstained kitchen, walking toward him. "Take it back. Take it back, I don't want to see!"

And all at once it erupted in him again, the savage, visceral, gorgeous feeling – the *zest*, as Hannibal had called it – that he'd felt in the moments after pulling the trigger, and every time he imagined it. The pleasure of it was all-consuming, but the second it ebbed away, a wave leaving the shore, it was replaced by a sick blast of the deepest guilt he'd ever felt.

Hobbs' corpse grinned at him, and reached out with mottled, purple fingers.

"Will."

He turned. There was Hannibal, next to his other self, his hands wrapped securely around Abigail's wound, stemming the blood.

"Will." A gentle hand on his, gripping it with a firm but reassuring pressure, and a palm cupping the side of his face. "Come back to me, Will."

The ambient pulse receded and he was back in Hannibal's office, back in the chair. Hannibal knelt next to him, watching him, his pale brows furrowed in concern. "Will?" he asked softly.

Will nodded and took a thin, trembling breath. His heart was beating out of his chest, rising up in his throat, and nausea crushed his stomach. Sudden tears pricked his eyes and spilled over in fat, wet drops.

"You're having a panic attack," Hannibal told him, running his thumb under Will's eye, catching a tear and brushing it aside. Will gripped Hannibal's other hand with sudden, desperate force, a silent plea for help. Hannibal guided him to his feet and eased himself free, taking a position behind Will, hands on his shoulders, a gentle, comforting pressure.

"I want you to breathe. In, out."

Will tried to comply, though his lungs felt caged by his ribs.

"Look around my office. Name five things that you see."

Will's eyes darted about wildly for a moment as his breath rasped between his lips. Hannibal's left hand shifted to the back of his neck, silken and cool against Will's flushed skin. "Say them aloud," he said.

"W-window," Will stuttered. "Chair. Couch. Book. Carpet. P-painting."

"Count the stripes on the curtains in your head." Hannibal's hand against Will's neck seemed to radiate a calm that spread down his spine, retracting his heart from his throat and tempering the churning of his stomach. "Now, close your eyes."

"I don't want to," Will blurted, his hands balling into fists at his sides.

"I'm here with you," Hannibal said, and Will could feel his words against the back of his ear. "Close your eyes."

Will complied, though a pained sound came from his throat. To his surprise and deep relief, there was nothing behind his eyelids but darkness.

"Now, I want you to listen. Take a moment and try to find as many sounds as you can."

Will's breaths lengthened as he did as the doctor ordered.

"Tell me what you hear."

Will raised his sleeve to his forehead and wiped the perspiration away. "Traffic outside," he said, voice hoarse as if he'd been yelling. "The ventilation system. The clock ticking. My heart. Your breathing."

"Very good. Now focus on the sensations of your body as it exists in this space. Feel your shoes against your feet, the floor beneath them. Feel your clothes against your body. Feel my hands." Hannibal spread them across Will's shoulders again, splaying his fingers, curling them over so their fingertips brushed Will's clavicle through his shirt. Hannibal's right index, however, somehow made it into his collar to touch the rise of bone there skin to skin.

As Will concentrated, he felt the pressure in his chest alleviate, his pulse slowing. His stomach settled. He kept his eyes closed, focusing on the sensations. Everything he felt bled away in increments, until there was nothing to perceive except for Hannibal's touch on his bare skin. A new feeling, such a relief from the pulverizing fear and guilt and pain, took over his body bit by bit. It was desire, and he was too vulnerable and raw to fight it. He simply acknowledged it and returned to the moment.

"Think about what you can smell," Hannibal advised, his thumbs applying an increasing compression into the bunched muscles of Will's neck and shoulders, melting down the tension.

"I smell you," Will said immediately and turned, forcing Hannibal to drop his hands.

Hannibal's eyes were dark, and his expression was neutral, but Will easily picked up the pleasant surprise rolling off of him like his scent.

"Ask me what I taste," Will dared him, overcome by the scorching want that sang over his every nerve, burning away and replacing the guilt and terror that had debilitated him only moments before. He curled his hand around Hannibal's burgundy and gold damask tie, twisting it over his knuckles, forcing Hannibal to lean closer.

Hannibal's hands slid around Will's narrow hips. "What do you want to taste?" he inquired softly.

Will responded by pulling the tie harder, snaking his other arm around Hannibal's back, and crushing their bodies together, then answered Hannibal's question by kissing him, insistent, fierce. Hannibal denied him for a cruel moment, then submitted, his touch roaming down to Will's backside as Will let go of his tie and drew a handful of Hannibal's hair into his grasp instead. The sound Hannibal made when Will reached between them to feel his outline through the fine fabric of his trousers was precious – so starkly unbridled in contrast to his usual stoicism. This, Will realized, also made him feel powerful.

Hannibal pulled his hand away, closing his fingers around Will's wrist in an unexpectedly steely grip. With his other, he caught Will by the jaw, thumb on his lower lip. "Are you going to run away from me again?" he asked with a tilt of his head.

"No," Will promised. Hannibal pushed his thumb into Will's mouth and he sucked on it for a tantalizing moment, moving his tongue along its length.

"Then come back to my bed, where you should have stayed." Hannibal let go of him and stepped away, pausing to see if Will would follow.

He did. The car ride was silent, a blurry fever dream. The shadowy house, the stairs, the hallway, they were all marked by unreality. Will half-expected to see the dark outline of the stag he'd been seeing more and more often in his sleep. And then they were together again, Will coming at Hannibal with the same insistent fervor, ignoring the voices in his head that told him that this wasn't right, was a sure path to ruin, was a violation of each of their professional codes. There was no time for thoughts. There was only presence. The moment. He noted their existence and let them go.

Hannibal shrugged off his jacket while Will pulled gracelessly at his tie, trying to undo the buttons of his own shirt one-handed. Hannibal assisted him deftly while Will took care of the cuffs. Hannibal seemed to allow his hand to travel the bare plane of Will's chest down to his navel while Will freed him of his starched oxford. They left their clothes on the floor, a phalanx of fallen soldiers stretching from the door to the bed where Will took Hannibal roughly by the wrist and the small of his back and dragged him down. They spread against one another, Will reveling in the vast, hedonistic expanse of skin against skin, drowning willingly in Hannibal's scent – cologne, yes, but also a man's body, and something else, an almost Byzantine perfume of iron and smoke.

Will's mouth felt split, so long did Hannibal kiss him, crushed like overripe fruit. He was so aroused it was painful in body and mind. At last Hannibal pulled back, both of them breathing hard. He gazed down at Will with an expression of veneration reserved for stained glass saints in the presence of miracles. He ran his fingers slowly across Will's brow, then down his cheek, under his chin to the hollow of his throat.

Hannibal spread his hand over Will's neck now, giving it the briefest squeeze, just enough for Will to feel the strength of it.

"Close your eyes," Hannibal instructed once more.

Will complied, and the darkness multiplied the sensation of Hannibal's touch traveling the path of his sternum, slowly greeting his navel, then continuing lower until it touched, at last, his straining anatomy. Will sighed out a relieved moan as Hannibal gathered them both in his grasp, the undersides touching. Hannibal moved his hips, an exploratory thrust, holding himself up with his free arm. Will lost himself, emitting another exhale of deep delight, gripping Hannibal's shoulders.

Hannibal thrust forward again and again and Will threw his head back, exposing his neck. "Oh *God*," he moaned, digging his fingers into Hannibal's skin.

"That's not my name," Hannibal murmured into the flesh of his throat before kissing it, flicking it with his tongue, and then biting Will, harder than the first time, almost to the point of discomfort, right where his shoulder met the neck.

The sudden braiding of pain and pleasure sent Will over the edge, the darkness of his vision flashing white before fading into gray-scale. The muscles in Hannibal's shoulders tensed at his own release, and he lowered himself down carefully next to Will with a sigh of blissful exhaustion.

Will opened his eyes to take in the deep blue ceiling for a few moments, his breathing sorting itself out, fingers tentatively exploring the pearly drops that had settled on his chest and stomach. Hannibal loomed into his vision, angling down to kiss him again, gentle now. Will turned on his side and pulled Hannibal's arm around his chest. Hannibal didn't resist, opening his hand over Will's heart.

Will slipped in and out of a state of half-sleep, drained in the wake of pleasure and his heightened emotional state from earlier in the evening. His body was languid, weak, his mind blessedly quiet in the warmth of Hannibal's embrace, the press of his body wholly reassuring. He woke to Hannibal's lips on the back of his shoulder, moving toward his spine, then lower. "Mhmm," he murmured into the pillow, stealing a glance at his watch. He must have slept – it was almost ten, and he'd initially come to Hannibal's office a little after seven.

"This looks like a stab wound," Hannibal murmured against the flesh of his back. Will shivered, feeling the hairs on his neck rise at the cool fingertips tracing the scar at the base of his shoulder blade. "Who stitched you up?"

"ER doctor in New Orleans," Will answered, turning in Hannibal's arms until they were face to face. Hannibal traced the knuckle of his index finger under Will's chin, lifting it to bring their mouths together again for a sweet moment.

"Sloppy. I wouldn't have left a scar like that," Hannibal told him. "Was it deep? It could have easily debilitated your rotator cuff."

"It did." Will tucked his head under Hannibal's chin. He could feel Hannibal's pulse against his cheek.

"Is that why you left homicide?"

"No," Will told him.

Surprisingly, Hannibal left it at that. In the ensuing silence, broken only by their breathing, he slept again.

This time when he woke up, he was alone in bed. He got up, legs still a little weak, and went to the en-suite bathroom, a spacious oasis of sand-colored stone tiles, a soaking tub and a walk-in shower, and cleaned up a bit, sliding back into his underwear and shirt, leaving the latter unbuttoned. Just as he was rolling up the sleeves to his elbows again, Hannibal reappeared in his robe, carrying a decanter of red wine and two glasses.

"I'm not leaving," Will said immediately, a response to Hannibal's miffed expression. "Not yet."

"Good." Hannibal set the glasses down on the marble table next to the dead fireplace and filled them before returning to the rumpled bed to hand one to Will. They settled against the pillows, drinking in silence. Will slung one of his legs over Hannibal's and Hannibal smiled at him in profile.

"I'm glad you're not running away this time." Hannibal swirled the wine in his glass and watched the viscous streaks run down the glass.

"Me too," Will said. He took a drink, not really tasting it, and spoke again. "We still shouldn't... say anything."

"You assume you take all the risk," Hannibal replied, looking at him now, the soft lighting catching the dark pools of his eyes. It pleased Will to see him like this, his hair awry, a little stubble burn on his chin, though the seriousness of his expression was less than ideal in the moment. "I could lose my license."

"Right." Will looked away, suddenly feeling small and awkward.

Hannibal must have sensed it; he put his arm around Will and nosed at his temple before pressing his lips there briefly. The clock in the hall chimed eleven. "It's late," Hannibal said. "Abigail's nurses in Intensive Care must be wondering what's keeping you."

Will felt a pang of regret. "Jack told you."

"You're spending your nights there." Hannibal finished his wine and set the glass on his nightstand. "As well as every free moment."

"I want to be there when she wakes up," Will said softly, setting his glass to the side as well. "It's like you said. I feel... obligated. Someone should be there for her when she wakes up, someone who actually cares."

"Someone who believes in her innocence?" Hannibal suggested.

"That too."

"Will." Hannibal put a hand over Will's where it rested on his thigh. "She very well may have helped her father kill those girls. Are you prepared to face that possibility?"

"You said you found that idea vulgar," Will argued, bristling, pulling his hand away.

Hannibal caught it in an iron grip and didn't let go. "Vulgar but possible. Perhaps even probable."

Will relaxed his arm and let Hannibal keep a hold on his hand. Hannibal's grip loosened in kind. Will looked at him, then at the mirror above the fireplace where he could just see the edge of the bench at the end of the bed. "A few weeks before my mom left," he began after a hesitant breath. "She was driving me home from a crawdad boil at my auntie's. She'd been drinking, probably smoking something. It was dark – we were driving on a back road – and she was trying to light a cigarette.

"Then – there was this man all the sudden, walking his dog. I-I don't know what he was doing out there in the dark, late at night, but..." He trailed off, running his tongue between his lips for a long moment in thought. "She hit him," Will said. "And she just kept driving. To this day I don't know what happened to him – if he was okay. All I knew was that I'd heard the dog yelp – scream in pain. Or–or terror. I started bawling, just crying my eyes out. And my mother... my mother, she grabbed my arm and she said, 'Billy, don't you ever tell anyone. Ever. Not a word. Promise me on your life.'" He swallowed, throat constricting with sudden emotion.

"Will," Hannibal said softly.

"And I never told *anyone*. Not after she left. Not when my dad was badmouthing her, not when her whole family insisted that I shouldn't love her, that she was a whore and an addict. I never said a word." He turned his hand, clasping Hannibal's and squeezing it. "Until now. Right now."

"Why did you keep the secret so long?" Hannibal massaged Will's hand with his thumb.

"Because she was my mother. That's it. That's the only reason. I remember... *so little* about her it's like I never knew her. She, uhm... barely existed for me. But I cried every night for a month after that happened — about the dog, really — but she was my mom. And she made me promise."

Hannibal let go of his hand and moved to sit where they could see each other directly. "If Abigail Hobbs helped her father," he said slowly, enunciating deliberately, "you wouldn't sit in judgment." He paused. "A five-year-old and a nineteen-year-old are not the same, Will."

"I'm just saying that I... understand." Will brushed his eyes and looked away, at Hannibal's hand against the sheet, memorizing its lines, the shape of his nails.

"As do I," Hannibal told him, though he didn't explain further. "When she wakes up—"

"If she wakes up," Will muttered darkly.

"When she wakes up," Hannibal insisted, "we'll go see her. Together. I think together would be best. Until then, Will — take care of yourself." He shifted to his knees and straddled Will's legs, leaning in to kiss him again. "Stay here tonight. Rest."

"Don't know if I'll be able to sleep," Will said with the ghost of a smile. "I'm so used to the hospital sofa."

Hannibal got out of bed and hung up his robe, leaving him in a distractingly tight pair of black underwear. Will helped him fold down the bedclothes and they slid between the sheets. Will sank against the pillows with a little sigh. Hannibal pressed against him, then propped himself up on his elbow. He traced his fingers through Will's curls, smoothing them to the side.

"That's twice now," Hannibal said, "that you've kissed me unexpectedly, Will."

"You weren't the only one surprised," Will told him. "I don't — I never do things like this."

"Then I must ask you why." Hannibal fingered the sore spot on the side of Will's throat. He winced. That bite had no doubt left a mark. "The first time I could chalk up to an inebriated moment, but tonight was different, was it not?"

Will nodded, choosing to look at the ceiling instead, pulling the blankets up protectively. "I, uh— I needed..." He sighed, and let himself lock eyes with Hannibal again. "I needed my paddle," he said, no more than a whisper.

Hannibal's mouth curved up at the corners, a tender expression. He folded Will against himself. Will settled easily against his chest, cheek against the textured hair.

"You know," Hannibal said against the top of Will's head, "if you wanted me to paddle you, you might have said something." He reached down and cupped Will's backside.

Will barked out a disbelieving laugh. "Was that a joke?"

"You laughed," Hannibal pointed out. "Next time, perhaps?"

They shared a quiet chuckle.

"What happened tonight," Will said as Hannibal rhythmically stroked his hair, "with the... panic attack... Do you really think I'm ready to go back into the field?"

"You dealt with Stammets. And you saved Abigail's life again. Jack has every faith in you." Hannibal paused. "Do you think you're ready?"

"What if I have another one?" Will settled his hand against Hannibal's ribs.

"Then you'll do as I taught you," Hannibal reassured him. "Use your five senses. Be present in the moment."

"Got it. Kiss the nearest person."

A gentle tug on his hair. "If you must. Though I would try to avoid Jack Crawford."

Will laughed gently, and could feel Hannibal do the same.

They were quiet for a while. Outside it had begun to rain, the constant drumming of water against the roof lulling Will towards sleep. "Hannibal?"

"Yes."

Will hesitated, then asked, "Why'd you kiss me back?"

Hannibal shifted until they lay face to face. "You're very kissable, Will." He proved it by bringing their mouths together again for a long moment.

At last, they broke apart. "I'll make omelets tomorrow," Hannibal promised as Will's weary eyes slid shut.

"Hannibal?" he murmured.

"Yes, Will?"

"No mushrooms."

"I wouldn't dream of it," Hannibal promised.

And... CUT.

Now, start Season 1 Episode 3: Potage. Pay special attention to the scene where Will and Hannibal visit Abigail. Hannibal hears Will lie to the girl, claiming killing is the "ugliest thing in the world," knowing that Will admits he liked killing her father.

Stay tuned!

Season 1 Episode 3: Potage

Chapter Summary

Will and Hannibal have accompanied Abigail Hobbs to Bloomington, Minnesota to visit the house where her parents died. After Abigail and Marissa are confronted by Nicholas Boyle, Hannibal invites Will back to his hotel room to discuss the Minnesota Shrike's copycat. All this talk of murder, and one thing leads to another.

Chapter Notes

Companion Song: "It's Only" by ODESZA feat. Zyra

"It's only water, it's only fire, it's only love / It's only slaughter, we're only liars, it's only blood..."

This "cut unscene" occurs a few hours after Abigail Hobbs and her friend Marissa are confronted by Nicholas Boyle behind Abigail's former residence. Nicholas, spurred on by Freddie Lounds, calls Abigail a murderer and badgers her until Marissa hits him in the head with a small rock. Hannibal and Will hear the commotion and come outside, causing Boyle to flee. The incident prompts Will to suggest they call it a day and return to the hotel; Alana, Abigail, Hannibal, and Will plan to visit Garret Jacob Hobbs' cabin the next morning. The scene begins at 28:02.

The ride back to the Super 8 bristled with silence. Hannibal wove easily through traffic, retracing their path from the commute to Abigail's house that morning without hesitation. Will sat next to him in the passenger's seat, painfully aware of Alana's eyes on the back of his head, and of Abigail's sulky quiet. He glanced back at the girl for a moment and caught her eye, then looked away as if he'd been burned.

He settled for looking out the window, leaning on his hand with his elbow on the window frame. Every few feet, it seemed, there was some kind of sign or advertisement that mentioned the nearby Mall of America, as if Bloomington's existence hung on its economic gravitational pull, worshiping its tacky middle-America charm and unbridled consumerism.

Told you so, he thought. *Very Mall of America. Wind-chafed skin.* He sighed, nearly imperceptibly. *Not sure who you'd say "I told you so" to,* his inner monologue replied with a certain measure of sass.

In his periphery, Will saw Hannibal glance his way. They shared a look laden with meaning, seeming to Will as if Hannibal understood how hard returning to the Hobbs house had been. Will nodded in response, and they both turned their attention back to the road.

Pulling into the motel's cracked asphalt parking lot, Hannibal drove around back to drop them off closest to the room Alana was sharing with Abigail. "So, dinner in an hour?" Alana asked, leaning forward to speak to Will and Hannibal in the front seat.

"I'm not hungry," Abigail said flatly.

"You should eat," Will and Hannibal said in a chorus. Will found himself suppressing a smile that felt inappropriate.

"Where would we go?" Abigail asked, crossing her thin arms protectively over her body. "Everywhere I go someone's gonna recognize me. I don't feel like getting called a murderer in an Applebee's."

"Why don't we order out?" Alana suggested gently, putting her hand on Abigail's shoulder. "Some pizza or something?"

Abigail shrugged it off. "Whatever."

"I'll call it in." Alana was unfazed by Abigail's dismissive behavior, speaking to her with respectful understanding. She pulled out her phone. "You can tell me which place has the best pie around here. What do you two want on yours?"

"I'm afraid we must decline," Hannibal said. "I need Will to go over the copycat's case file with me again this evening." He glanced at Will. "If he agrees to my request, that is."

"Sure," Will said, feeling a small tremor go through his body as though he'd touched a low-voltage electric fence.

"All right. See you tomorrow then. Come on, Abigail." Alana got out and rounded the silver SUV from behind, opening Abigail's door to collect her. Hannibal waited until they were safely in the motel room before pulling out of the parking lot and heading back to the freeway.

"Where are we going?" Will asked as the Super 8 disappeared behind them.

"I have a room at the Edina Galleria," Hannibal told him, merging onto the highway.

Will scoffed a laugh. "Wait a second. The FBI stuck us at the Super 8 and put you up at the Marriott?"

"I put myself up there," Hannibal told him, "so please, assuage your fears about Jack wasting taxpayer dollars."

"Right," Will said as they passed yet another billboard for the Mall of America. Then, "Do you think this trip was... is it worth it? I feel like we aren't any closer to finding evidence of what Hobbs did with what was left of those girls. And... maybe we're doing damage in the process."

"What kind of damage?" Hannibal pulled up in front of a shimmering glass building that seemed to be all windows, easing the SUV just past the hotel's wide front doors and stopping at the valet booth.

"To Abigail," Will said as they got out. He shouldered his battered leather satchel and followed Hannibal into the sleek, modern lobby.

"Good evening," Hannibal greeted the desk clerks. They responded politely in kind as Will and Hannibal crossed to the bank of elevators.

Hannibal waited until they were in the elevator with the door shut to say, "You believe Alana was right? Jack shouldn't have sided with me?"

"No, no," Will backtracked quickly. "I mean..." He stopped and took a steadying breath. "What if she was? You agreed with her that going to the house could potentially re-traumatize Abigail."

The elevator opened to the fourteenth floor, and Hannibal led him to a door at the end of the hallway, pulling out an electronic key card. "I find it interesting," he said, opening the door wider to let Will in, "that no one has mentioned your potential re-traumatization, Will. And here I thought Jack saw you as his fragile little teacup."

Hannibal had sprung for an executive corner room. Will did his best to ignore the snow-white expanse of the king-size bed and instead took the seat Hannibal offered him on the nearby sofa. As Will rooted through his satchel for the file on Cassie Boyle's murder, Hannibal went to the hotel phone. "Yes, could you please send up two wine glasses?" he requested, then thanked the front desk and hung up.

Will arranged some of the crime scene photos on the round metal and glass coffee table in front of the sofa. The juxtaposition of rustic, visceral ultra-violence and the clean, sterilized comfort of the hotel room's lighting, colors, and decor made him feel strange, unmoored. "Something about this is almost... folk horror," he murmured to himself, vaguely aware that Hannibal was moving around the room, hanging up his suit jacket, opening the small fridge for a bottle of wine, and answering the door at the staff's soft knock. "But not — not pure ritual. It's like a director attempting to recreate something he sees as having the folk horror elements he wants to convey, but there's a separation —a separation of reimagining — reiteration. Do it again, but with a separate artistic vision. An auteur. It goes deeper than a copycat. That's not even the right term for this killer, not really."

Hannibal sat next to him on the sofa, and handed him a glass of chilled white wine. "I generally prefer this for summer," he said, holding the glass and its golden liquid up to the light for a moment. "But its color reminds me of the yellow leaves this time of year. And oak has an autumn taste."

"Hmm." Will took the glass from him without glancing up, still glued to the crime scene photos.

"Will."

Will tore himself away to look at Hannibal, and was momentarily shocked by his nearness. He plummeted into an instant self-consciousness, eyes darting right back to the grisly photos.

"Leave that a moment," Hannibal requested. He buried his nose in his wine glass, inhaling before tasting. Will took an exploratory drink as well, not really savoring it. Still, it was cold, and felt like heaven against the rapid heat that rose in his face and neck. "What was it like," Hannibal asked him, "returning to the scene of the shooting?"

"I-I don't know," Will stuttered, setting down his wine glass to strip off his green jacket and drape it over the arm of the sofa. Was it hot in here? "I wasn't thinking about myself. I was trying to help Abigail get through it. Though I kept — saying the wrong thing. Why did I tell her about the body outlines? She — she didn't need to know that."

"It was the truth." Hannibal crossed his legs and took another drink. Will was, all at once, keenly aware of how Hannibal's slacks rode up over his ankle as he did so, presenting an elegantly patterned sock that hugged the ball-end of bone there. "As I told Jack, I believe Abigail will benefit most from being presented with the stark reality of what happened to her. It's the only way to prevent denial and push her toward acceptance."

"I don't want her in pain. I don't want to cause — I've already caused enough." Will swallowed more wine to soothe his throat.

"Honesty is crucial if you wish to avoid more pain down the road." Hannibal pulled on the zipper of the sweater he wore over his oxford and tie, lowering it inch and adjusting his collar.

"It doesn't feel like that," Will said softly, tracing his finger down the wine glass's stem.

"Honesty need not be brutal. We have no desire to be brutal to the ones we love — or we shouldn't. Honesty can be gentle as well."

"Sometimes, I wish I didn't care," Will admitted, then drained his glass, setting it among the field of gruesome, glossy photographs. "I wish I didn't feel the obligation to her. It's so... heavy. Do you — am I a bad person?"

"Compassion can be inconvenient. It often is." Hannibal rescued Will's glass and returned to the desk where he'd left the wine, refilling it before handing it back. "All love is, in truth. But can you imagine a world without it?"

They were both quiet for a while. Will leaned forward and rested his elbows on his knees, rubbing his face, fingers against stubble making the slightest prickling noise.

Hannibal broke the silence, but with care. "Tell me, Will, why were you dishonest with Abigail when she asked you how it felt to kill her father?"

Will straightened. "What?" he asked, tasting the word's sharp, bitter edge.

"In the conservatory at her residential facility," Hannibal clarified, setting down his wine on the end table at his side where it glowed pure gold beneath the shaded lamp. "She asked you if killing someone, even if you have to do it, feels bad, even horrific. You called it the ugliest thing in the world."

"It is," Will said bluntly, refusing to look at Hannibal. He leaned forward again and pretended to organize the crime scene photos, moving them from one side of the table to the other.

"That's not what you told me."

Will got to his feet, rubbing his lip with a trembling hand. Hannibal watched him pace the length of the bed. "What was I supposed to say? That I *liked* killing her father? Jesus, Hannibal."

"You catastrophized," Hannibal said. "Using an absolute like *ugliest*. Do you think her incapable of understanding the layers of feeling attached to such an act?"

"She's just a kid!" Will snapped, louder than he meant to. Taking a shaky breath, he tore off his glasses, rubbed his eyes and pinched the bridge of his nose.

"She's a young woman," Hannibal corrected him. "Often, we become what others see of us. See her as strong, Will. See her as resilient, and she may grow into your expectations."

"Instead of treating her like my own little teacup," Will murmured, hands shoved in his pockets, eyes focused on the carpet. He inhaled, then let the air out slowly, crossing his arms against himself. "I get it," he admitted.

"We've spoken about paddles. About structures of support," Hannibal said. "Abigail is lucky to count you as part of hers."

"Alana says I collect strays." Will sank back onto the couch, catching a whiff of Hannibal's signature scent that he actively tried to ignore.

"Collect or steal?"

They laughed softly. "If anything," Will said, "coming here has shown Abigail that she still has a friend. It was... brave of that girl to come over. What was her name?"

"Marissa," Hannibal recalled.

"Marissa," Will echoed. "She's a hell of a shot with a rock."

"Her visit was appreciated. Though I'm not sure what kind of influence she is; I don't approve of the way she spoke to her mother," Hannibal said.

"That's teenagers for you," Will said before turning back to the photos on the coffee table.

"Vulgar." Hannibal leaned forward to pick up one of the pictures in front of Will, bringing them closer together.

Will instantly ached to close that distance. He and Hannibal hadn't been alone together since the morning after their last therapy session. Omelets, coffee, more sex, then Will had to run off to class.

Remembering that morning and its activities wasn't a good idea at the moment. This was work, wasn't it? It seemed inappropriate to move things in any other direction. He was here to talk about the copycat. They were here to find whatever was left of Garret Jacob Hobbs' victims and bring Abigail to a point of acceptance. And prove, at Jack's insistence, that Will was right in his assessment of the copycat.

"Where was I?" Will murmured, shuffling through the file's contents, flipping through the autopsy notes.

"Folk horror," Hannibal reminded him. "Tell me more about this term."

"It's used to describe film, mostly — movies that use elements of folklore to inspire fear. They, ah —" he set down the heavy file and picked up one of the crime scene photos that caught a crow alighting on the body. "They use rural settings — isolation — and themes about the darkness of nature, human or otherwise. Uh, *The Lottery*?"

Hannibal took the photo from him and examined it himself. Their fingers brushed together and Will pulled his hand away quickly. "The short story about the little town that sacrifices its residents by stoning," Hannibal said.

"Right. And films like *The Wicker Man*. There are also usually undercurrents of religious zealotry and violence."

"Human sacrifice."

"Right. That's what this feels like to me, but it's not an exact match." Will absently took another drink of wine, eyes never leaving the photographs. "It's like the *set* of a folk horror film. Because the people making the movie aren't *of* the place. Not locals, the people they're trying to portray as their monsters."

"The concept of sacrifice is interesting." Hannibal picked up another photo and leaned back, considering it carefully. "You said in your lecture that the killer presented his victim this way in order to show you he was definitely *not* the Minnesota Shrike. Perhaps Cassie Boyle was sacrificed in order to make this knowledge clear. To show us the boundaries of Hobbs. His limitations."

"Sacrificed in order to show the true pecking order," Will mused, handing Hannibal another picture where carrion birds were present. "He wanted us to know who was... better. Who was the true artist versus the — the humble hunter. The folk of this folk horror."

"Elevating it to art." Will glanced at Hannibal and was caught off guard by his smile, one Will recognized as being, he thought, reserved for when they were in bed together.

"I only heard the tail end of your lecture on the copycat," Hannibal told him, taking both of their empty wine glasses back to the desk and leaving them there next to the sweating bottle. "What was your overall assessment?"

"He's an intelligent psychopath with a strong sense of — staging — and aesthetics," Will said, stumbling over his words a bit as Hannibal moved closer to him on the sofa, ostensibly to reach for another photo he quickly glanced at and put back down. Again, Hannibal's scent invaded Will's space, bringing with it flashes of their previous encounters that crackled through Will's vivid imagination like heat lightning on the horizon.

"I recall," Hannibal said softly, looking at Will now, their knees less than an inch from touching, "you called him a sadist."

"R-right," Will stammered, utterly aware of how close their shoulders were now as well. "And smart enough to never kill like this again. It'd be like a painter trying to paint a completed masterpiece again. The elements would never exist the same — the same way. Never — align. No, he'll move on to what he sees as his next great work."

"A masterpiece. Hmm." Hannibal caught Will's gaze and held it, his eyes dark, reflecting the ambient glow of the nearby lamp's soft bulb.

Will nodded, trying not to think about that tiny fissure of space between their knees and shoulders, desperate not to imagine its annihilation. He pressed his lips together to keep them in line and looked away, back to the pile of murder on the table in front of them.

Hannibal reclined a bit and draped his arm over the back of the couch. Will sensed Hannibal's hand inches from his neck and felt the hairs there raise, a Braille of chilled desire. He moistened his lower lip, watching Hannibal watch him out of his periphery. A bloated pause formed in the ensuing silence.

"I'm disappointed, Will."

Will turned to him quickly. "With my assessment? What, you agree with Jack? I'm not on the right track?"

Hannibal tilted his head a few degrees. "Not at all. I find your observations more than astute."

"Then why did you say that?" Will's cheeks erupted in heat, the question stinging out of his mouth.

"We've been here for over an hour," Hannibal said mildly, "and you haven't tried to kiss me yet."

Will turned to him in sharp incredulity. "What?"

Hannibal smiled. Will started when Hannibal's hand closed over the back of his neck, fingers teasing up into the curls.

Will was instantly aware of every article of clothing he was wearing, and they felt like a prison he was desperate to escape. "I was trying to — I thought we were working..."

"We were. And now we're not." He took Will's hand in his own, and raised it to his mouth, pressing his lips against Will's scarred knuckles, kissing the ghosts of a thousand mishaps with fish hooks, tools, knives, and the occasional fistfight.

"We're not." Will confirmed this by reclaiming his hand and putting the file folder back in his satchel.

He moved to sweep up the photos, but Hannibal caught his wrist and pulled him to his feet toward the bed. "Leave it," he advised, catching Will around the waist.

Will put trembling hands on Hannibal's shoulders, unable to stop the self-conscious but genuine smile from crossing his face. "Sorry to, ah — keep you waiting," he said.

"No apologies," Hannibal reminded him as Will leaned in for the kiss he'd been asked for. Arousal took hold of Will's entire being and burned the insecurity away. He pressed his body into Hannibal's, wrapping his arms around his neck and bringing the kiss deeper, the sensations in his mouth promising things to other parts of his anatomy. Keeping their lips together, Will made a clumsy attempt at Hannibal's belt.

Hannibal pulled back and released him, leaving Will a hard-breathing mess. In no hurry, he sat in the desk chair and carefully removed his shoes, then went to the closet to hang up his pullover. Will stripped off his sweater and shoes as well, then caught Hannibal watching him from across the room as he meticulously undid his tie to hang up next to the rest of the clothes. Will slowed his feverish undressing and went one button at a time with his dress shirt, his pulse pounding, feeling Hannibal's gaze as a caress with each inch of skin revealed.

Hannibal hung up his trousers, smoothing them carefully over the hanger. As he turned back, Will could easily tell how desirous he was based on his silhouette in profile, even at a brief glance. Still, Hannibal took his time returning to Will, who was frozen in place, unable to tear his gaze away from the body he was only just getting to know, that had so many mysteries left, but that had brought him so much comfort and pleasure already.

Will had unthinkingly balled up his shirt in his hands, and Hannibal eased it out of his grasp and let it fall to the floor. He folded back the thick white duvet and sheet with a gentle whisper of fabric and got into bed, turning on his side, propped up on one elbow. "Come here," came the directive.

Will unbuckled his belt and stripped down the rest of the way, brushing off his innate discomfort with someone else's objectifying gaze and doing it all slowly, making Hannibal wait, though Hannibal was patient as always. The sheets felt pure and cool over his flushed skin as he slid between them, coming to rest against Hannibal for a brief kiss and a press of body against body. Will moved his hand down and caressed Hannibal through the black underwear he was still wearing, a frustrating barrier Will couldn't wait to get out of his way.

Hannibal sucked in a breath, but gently removed Will's hand. "Lie down," he instructed, turning Will onto his stomach. Will complied, but tensed, still propped up on his elbows, watching Hannibal's every move, his nerves flooded with a mix of desire and blade's-edge anxiety.

"Relax, Will." Hannibal straddled his hips and backside, and Will was very, very aware of his muscular thighs and their potential.

"I'm — I don't think I'm ready for this," Will said over his shoulder, sweat beading on his forehead.

"I know," Hannibal gave him a benevolent smile. "When you are, I have faith you'll let me know. Now please, relax."

Will forced himself to breathe out and lower his cheek to his folded arms. Hannibal massaged his neck for a few moments, easily finding the tight ligaments and tendons before moving down to his shoulder blades, paying special attention to the area around his old stab wound . "Mhmm," Will murmured into his own bicep. "That's a good spot..."

"I'm sure the plane ride did your old injury no good," Hannibal said, working his thumb into a particularly sore knot, first gently, then with more force.

"I keep forgetting you used to be a medical doctor," Will said as Hannibal lowered himself down to kiss the sore spot tenderly, running his tongue over the scar.

"An expert in anatomy," Hannibal promised. "And as a psychiatrist, I understand how psychic trauma can affect the physique just as much as the psyche. I can feel today's stressors in your body, Will." He worked at the tension in Will's neck and shoulders, finding points of sweet anguish that Will didn't even know were there. But soon enough, the therapeutic movements of his fingers seemingly could not help but become slow, erotic caresses. Hannibal stretched himself over Will, sitting on his lower back, and kissed the back of his ear lobe, the side of his neck, then on down his spine. Every few vertebrae or so, Will felt a brush of teeth.

Will stirred under him, his breath broadening, deepening, until he couldn't stand it any longer. He turned over and sat up. Hannibal allowed this, and welcomed the hungry kiss that blanketed his mouth and then moved down his own throat, to the hollow of his collarbone. However, when Will grasped at his shoulder and snaked an arm around his back, trying to reverse their positions, Hannibal resisted, gently at first, and then with increasing force. He planted a hand on Will's sternum and guided him down to the supine position he seemed to prefer.

"Damn," Will cursed in a strained whisper. Hannibal just smiled down at him, watching Will's flesh rise up as the fine hairs stood on end wherever Hannibal touched him. He leaned into Will's throat. The scent of their bodies mingled with that perfume of his was unnervingly perfect. Hannibal

kissed Will's neck again and again, moving from below his ear down to the collarbone and back up again, every so often putting his teeth against the skin, but never pressing too hard.

Will's breathing came short and fast, and his heart thundered beneath his ribs, the echo rising up into his own ears. "Hannibal," he said. It was a name and a plea, a single word laden with the cadence of begging.

At last, Hannibal touched him, a series of confident strokes. Will's hips, of their own volition, rocked up into Hannibal's grasp and he found himself locking one hand in a death grip among the feathers in the pillow behind his head, the other vice-like on Hannibal's thigh.

Just as he peaked, Hannibal's grasp loosened, edging him away. Will threw his head back, eyes squeezed shut, growling in frustration. "Trust me," Hannibal said, slowly resuming his work. Will forced himself to relax and let Hannibal build him up again. When the release came, it was powerful. He opened his mouth to gasp and found Hannibal's there, absorbing the sound of his climax with a deeply penetrative kiss.

At last, Hannibal seemed as urgent as Will had felt. As Will breathed through the afterglow, drawing his hand over his brow and running his fingers through his hair, Hannibal climbed out of his last article of clothing and pulled Will roughly to himself in a spoon position. Still quivering from the orgasm, Will moaned as Hannibal moved between his thighs with increasingly forceful thrusts.

Hannibal's hand traveled down his arm until it found Will's hand and clasped it over top, curling close to Will's chest in a tender, cradling position. Will couldn't see his face, but he could tell the mask was disintegrating, evidenced only by the ragged, fraught nature of Hannibal's breath against his ear and the side of his face.

"Will," he whispered, and spent. It left him trembling, but he did not let go of Will's hand, keeping Will's back pressed firmly against his chest, hips against Will's backside, legs intertwined.

The quiet hum of the HVAC was the only sound aside from their breathing, which slowly lengthened and quieted. Hannibal's lips found the side of his neck before burying his face in Will's hair. He inhaled and let out a satisfied sigh.

"That was — what you did..." Will didn't have the words. He turned in Hannibal's grasp and pressed their foreheads together, letting Hannibal's face go out of focus this close to his eyes as they kissed. Hannibal rolled him onto his back and lay over him, stroking his hair back from his forehead. Hannibal's slightly larger frame stretched over his, the comforting weight of it, created a sensation of tranquility. Inevitability. Being held here was the sweetest prison, one Will wouldn't dream of trying to escape.

"You enjoyed yourself." It wasn't a question, but Will still nodded in affirmation. "Good." Hannibal deposited a serene, almost domesticated kiss on Will's open mouth before rolling off of him. Will put his head on Hannibal's chest and listened to his heart.

After a time of pleasant dozing, Hannibal lifted Will's wrist to look at his watch. "Our dinner reservation is in twenty minutes. As much as I am loath to get dressed again."

"We could always order pizza," Will suggested as Hannibal slid out of his grasp and pulled on a fuzzy hotel robe. "Eat it in bed."

Hannibal looked at him sternly, though his eyes glittered with humor. "Will. This isn't a college dormitory."

Will laughed as Hannibal sank back onto the bed next to him to caress his face. "Come. It's rude to be late."

They cleaned up, re-dressed, and went down to the hotel's restaurant. Hannibal ordered for them both, including the wine, with a cat-that-got-the-canary smile, as if daring Will to disagree. He didn't.

As they talked and ate, Will felt a sense of domestic security wrap around him. It was as if the trip to Abigail's house — the place that would forever be locked in his head as where he'd killed a man — had never happened, or happened so long ago that it was inconsequential. Happened, perhaps, to someone else. The other Will. This Will, the one that was with Hannibal, was on the closest thing they'd come to a date.

It was late when the meal ended over a shared crème brûlée. Will insisted on paying, since it was his turn, and after a back-and-forth, Hannibal acquiesced. Will tried not to make any kind of facial expression when he saw the tab, mentally kissing this month's grocery budget goodbye. It was a relief when the card went through.

After signing the check and replacing the pen, Will reached out with an open palm, resting his hand on the table. Hannibal grasped it for a brief, gentle squeeze. "I wish I could stay here with you," Will told him, just loud enough to be heard over the pianist in the corner.

"So do I. But it wouldn't do to appear tomorrow morning with you wearing yesterday's clothes. Besides, they'll miss you at the dreadful continental breakfast."

Will chuckled ruefully. "Yeah, I know."

Hannibal drove him back to the Super 8. When stopped at the red light before the entrance to the parking lot, Hannibal leaned over to kiss him one last time, just in case Alana or Abigail saw them pull up in front of Will's room.

"Thank you for dinner," Hannibal said as he unbuckled his seat belt.

"Sure." Will sighed. "I'll see you tomorrow. Maybe we'll find something at the cabin that was missed the first time around." The weight of the real reason they were here in Minnesota draped over him suddenly, a length of cold iron chain.

"Goodnight, Will," Hannibal said as he got out. "Pleasant dreams."

Will thought of the stag and shivered in the autumn night's wind as Hannibal drove away, leaving pools of red tail lights behind on the wet pavement.

And... CUT.

Now, start the episode again. Uh oh! Looks like Will didn't have pleasant dreams after all. He's a sweaty mess – not the best way to start what ended up being a stressful day at the Hobbs cabin and a crazy evening with Abigail being attacked by Nicholas Boyle!

Stay tuned!

Season 1 Episode 4: Oeuf

Chapter Summary

Will is chilled by the idea he will never have a family, the loneliness leaving him cold, literally and figuratively. He ends up in Hannibal's shower, and...

Chapter Notes

Companion Song: "I Found" by Amber Run

"And I'll use you as a warning sign /That if you talk enough sense then you'll lose your mind... And I found love where it wasn't supposed to be / Right in front of me..."

This "cut unscene" occurs just before Will and Hannibal's second therapy session of the episode. In their first session, Will admits that the lines between his true self and Garret Jacob Hobbs are blurring, even though Hobbs is dead. Still, he insists, "I know who I am." Later, at the crime lab, Will, Brian, Jimmy, Jack, and Beverly are talking about birth order as they work on the Turner family murders. As the crew shares stories about their families (who wouldn't want to meet Jimmy's twin?) Will is forced to compare his experience growing up as a likely-unwanted only child whose mother left him. The next scene in the show cuts directly to Will and Hannibal's therapy session, but something happened in between, at timestamp 14:03.

"Buster!"

Will straightened up on the park bench. A blue heeler mix trotted out of the bushes not far from where he sat, wagging its tail, trailing a leash behind.

"Buster, get back here!" Someone in the distance called desperately before emitting a few whistles that echoed through the gray, wintertime landscape.

As the dog sniffed gleefully at the base of a trash can, a child's voice chimed in. "Buster! Busterrrr!"

Will got up slowly, tucking his phone back in his coat pocket. "Hello," he greeted the dog when she — it was female, Will could see, now that he was closer — looked up at him from where she'd been nosing a candy wrapper caught in the grass. "Hey girl. What are you doing, huh?" He knelt and reached out a hand, his movements smooth and nonthreatening.

The heeler trotted over to him right away, and he petted her gently before hooking a hand through her collar and picking up the leash.

He turned at the sound of wheels against the park's paved path. A tall woman with a messy brown bun jogged toward him pushing a stroller, another older child running at her side. "Buster!" the little girl cried, racing for Will and the dog.

The mother, out of breath, pulled up and let go of the stroller to put her palms on her knees for a moment. "Oh my God, thank you," she panted, straightening and resting her hands on her hips, breath clouding out of her mouth in the cold air. The little girl knelt down and put her arms around her dog. Buster licked her face and she squealed with laughter.

Will handed the woman back the leash. "No problem," he said.

"Seriously, thank you. I can only go so fast pushing this thing." She pointed to the stroller, which was laden down with a diaper bag, a child's book bag, and a baby wrapped in a pink parka and swaddled in blankets against the December chill. "And it's not like I'm gonna just leave the baby to chase the dog!" They shared a laugh.

"I have a Buster at home," Will said, putting his hands awkwardly in his coat pockets.

"A heeler? Or an idiot who runs away all the time?" the woman asked with a chuckle.

"A Buster. A-a dog... named Buster." Will knelt down next to the little girl and scratched the dog between the ears.

"You got a Buster too?" The little blonde girl was wide-eyed. "Where is he?"

"He's at home with my other dogs," Will told her shyly, looking at the heeler instead of the child. The girl was an adorable creature with red cheeks and huge blue eyes.

"Do you got a picture of your Buster?" the girl asked eagerly.

"Sweetie, we've already taken up a lot of his time—"

"N-no, it's okay." Will pulled out his phone and flipped through his pictures until he found one. "That's Max and Buster," he said, showing the girl the image.

She grabbed his phone out of his hand for a closer look. "Lissa," the mother warned.

"It's fine," Will said, a warm, liquid feeling spreading through his chest as he looked up to see the mother smiling down at him. She was pretty, he thought, and specifically not beautiful, which was a relief to him. Though the exercise leggings she wore were, in fact, more than a bit distracting.

"Well, let's see your Buster then." The mother held out her hand and her daughter placed Will's phone in it. "Aww! Look at these cuties. Are they rescues?"

"Yeah, they are. H-how about, ah... your Buster?"

"In a way." The mother handed him back his phone. "Our friends had to move into a building that didn't allow pets. We already loved Bustie to pieces, so we decided to take her, didn't we?"

"Yep!" the little girl confirmed. She'd already lost interest in the conversation and was picking up acorns from beneath a nearby tree.

"Have you ever been to the Patterson dog park?" the mother asked, her posture easy, her question warm, friendly.

"No, I haven't."

"You have to go sometime." She brushed his shoulder with her hand. "It's so much fun." The woman paused as her own phone rang, piercing their serene exchange with jangling digital notes. "It's my husband," she said apologetically. "He's probably wondering where we are, so..."

"Right," Will said, plastering a fake smile on, unable to look at her.

"Lissa, let's go! Say 'bye' to the nice man."

The little girl launched herself at Will, rocking him back on his heels, arms around his neck. "Thanks for saving my dog!"

"Welcome," he managed. She let go and he stood up quickly.

The mother answered her phone and waved goodbye with the other hand before pushing the stroller on down the path, Buster's leash secured on its handle. "Hi honey," she chirped brightly. "Yeah, we found her! This guy caught her for us, it was really great; he's like a total hero..."

"Bye!" the little girl called before racing to catch up with the rest of her family.

Will watched them until they disappeared around a bend in the path, obscured by the mostly-bare trees. A strange, hollow feeling invaded him when they were out of sight. It was cold and unwelcome — like stepping away from a campfire into the frosty night, or getting out of bed on a rainy morning. All at once, the ambient pulse in his mind whirred to life. He saw the Turners around their dinner table, executed, their tablecloth soaked in blood, flies buzzing around the remains of the pot roast. Maggots in the food, maggots in their bullet wounds. Mrs. Turner stared at him with glassy eyes, a hole in her forehead. Then she wasn't Mrs. Turner anymore. It was the mother he'd just encountered, dead on the table, the little girl slumped next to her, the baby—

"Shit," he cursed, rubbing his face with both hands. Nausea swelled against the back of his throat as if he was still in that blood-spattered dining room, surrounded by the scent of rotting meat. He was filled with the polar opposite, the negative space, the twisted mirror image of the warmth he'd momentarily felt. *For a few seconds,* his mind whispered, *you could pretend, even just for that*

fleeting moment, that this was <u>your</u> family. Felt good, didn't it? But that's not for you. That'll never be for you.

"I know better than to breed," he whispered angrily and turned the other direction, stalking down the path with his hands shoved in his pockets, shoulders hunched.

Before he knew it, Will stood in Hannibal Lecter's waiting room. He listened for a moment, trying to figure out if Hannibal was in his office with a patient. There were no voices from the other side of the door. Still, he hesitated a while before his hand shot out of his pocket, seeming to have a mind of its own, and rapped on the door.

After a long pause, where he almost gave up, Hannibal answered, a look of mild surprise on his features. It became a pleasant smile. "Will. You're early."

"I know," Will said. "I — I was in town already, and there was no point in driving back to Wolf Trap before the appointment. But, ah, if I'm interrupting something, I, uh — I can wait."

"Not at all. Please." Hannibal held the door open for him. Will saw Hannibal's suit jacket draped over the back of the desk chair where he'd obviously been seated, working on a drawing of the Bridge of Sighs in Venice. He had his shirtsleeves rolled up, probably to prevent them from getting smudged as he worked. A few pencil shavings littered the workspace, and a scalpel glittered at the base of the lamp that saturated the intricate drawing with light.

"Art therapy?" Will said, trying to keep things breezy.

"For me, drawing is an exercise in memory," Hannibal said. He stepped up to the desk and gathered the pencil shavings into his hands, depositing them in the wastebasket. "*Il Ponte dei Sospiri.* It connected the prison to the interrogation rooms of the Doge's palace. Named for the cries of the condemned that rang out over the Rio di Palazzo." He leaned over the drawing and added a tiny bit of shading on one of the covered bridge's small windows. "I last saw it as a young man, maybe twenty years old."

"It's incredible," Will said as Hannibal replaced his pencil in the desk drawer, the scalpel following after.

"Are you shivering, Will?" Hannibal came around the desk to stand in front of him. He reached out and touched Will's hand, then folded it between both of his own. "Your hands are freezing."

Will nodded, unable to stop himself from quaking all over. "Yeah. Don't know why — it's not that bad out."

Hannibal rubbed Will's hand between both of his to generate friction, then raised it to his mouth, blowing a gentle lungful of warm air against it. Somehow, this made Will shiver again, harder this time. "Have you eaten?"

"Yeah, no, I — I don't know..." Will felt torn as the warmth of Hannibal, the promise of him, pulled Will forcefully away from the sick, empty abandonment he'd felt in the park that still hung around like a foul odor in his brain. "I'll just run some hot water over them. It'll be fine."

Hannibal put a hand against the side of his face. "Cold too," he said. "We have time. Let me take you home."

"I'm fine." Will said it, but he still let Hannibal lock up the office and drive him the short distance to his home. Hannibal unlocked the front door and admitted Will into the foyer. "Go upstairs. Take a shower and warm up. I'll make some coffee. Or would you prefer tea?"

"Either. T-thank you." Will pulled his hands out of Hannibal's grasp and shoved them in his pockets again. Hannibal was right, he was freezing, chills wracking his body like he had a fever.

Hannibal excused himself to the kitchen, allowing Will to find his way up to the master suite. He opened the door to find the room dark, and fumbled around on the wall until he found a dimmer switch, bringing up the expertly-placed lighting enough that he could find his way to the bathroom. Teeth chattering, he kicked off his clothes in a pile on the smooth tile floor and stepped into the walk-in shower. He clawed at the knob until the water cascaded from the rain-style showerhead in a steamy torrential downpour.

As the water washed over him, Will closed his eyes, one hand on the sand-colored stone shower wall to steady himself. He tried to will his body to stop shaking, to force his muscles to relax.

In the black behind his eyes, he saw himself as if he'd floated outside his body, soaked hair slicked against his head, ebony with moisture. And then it wasn't him in Hannibal's shower. It was Garret Jacob Hobbs, standing just as Will was standing, the water splattering off of the scalp of his balding head. A foreign body, not his own, hairy, sinewy with hard labor. Hannibal's elegantly designed shower melted out of existence, replaced with the peach tiles of the Hobbs house's master bathroom. There was Hobbs' bottle of Head & Shoulders, his bar of humble white soap, nestled in a wire caddy that hung from the plain chrome showerhead with the rest of his wife's products.

Desperate to dissolve the vision, Will moved, dropping his arm from the shower wall and running his hands through his hair. The Hobbs in his mind did the same thing, and Will could feel the smooth bare scalp and the bristly hairs that remained at his temples.

Will's eyes shot open and he shivered violently, gasping softly as he rubbed his face, trying to bring himself back to his own body. He grappled with double vision — seeing what was physically before him *and* seeing Hobbs mimicking his movements right down to his facial expression. The harder he pushed to come back to himself, the paler Hobbs' skin became, eyes clouding over. Will struggled harder, and felt his stomach clench as one bullet wound after the other opened over Hobbs' body, blood pouring out and mixing pink with the shower water. The sucking wounds in Hobbs' chest inhaled water as Will breathed and exhaled mist and steam.

"Stop," Will whispered, begging himself.

"Will."

Will dropped his hands from his face and turned to see Hannibal on the other side of the glass shower wall. He'd picked up Will's clothes, hanging the shirt neatly from a hook on the wall, leaving his pants folded on a nearby chair, shoes on the floor beneath. There were fresh towels on the rack just outside the shower, though Will hadn't heard him come in over the sound of the water and his own internal panic. Being startled out of his nightmarish reverie was such a welcome sensation that Will forgot to be self-conscious about standing there naked while Hannibal was fully clothed in a dress shirt, tie, and vest.

"How are you feeling?" Hannibal asked him, coming closer to the glass wall and putting one palm on it, his image a mosaic of droplets.

"S-still cold," Will managed as a shiver wracked his body and locked up his jaw.

"The tea's nearly finished. I'll be back in a moment." Hannibal left the bathroom, shutting the door softly behind himself.

Remember what Hannibal taught you, Will's rational brain reminded him, a gentle nudge. *Use your senses.*

Will focused on the various products that Hannibal had in his shower, sitting neatly on a built-in shelf, forcing himself to read the brand names one at a time. Then he closed his eyes, ready to focus on the sounds he could perceive.

The second he allowed darkness back over his vision, his perception was torn away from him against his will. The ambient pulse roared back, saturating his mind's eye with images of the Turner family. They morphed into the mother and daughter he'd seen at the park, and then, horrifically, into Hannibal and Abigail, Hannibal's lifeless eyes looking plaintively at him beneath the hole in his forehead.

"Will."

Again, Hannibal's cadence of his name brought him back, anchoring him to what was real. He turned to see Hannibal close the bathroom door and approach the shower. He'd stripped and put on his burgundy robe, and was holding another, black with white piping, draped over his arm. This he hung on another hook next to the shower, and untied the one he was wearing, slipping it free of his body.

Hannibal stepped into the shower, and Will turned to face him, feeling something a thousand times deeper than merely being grateful. Relief washed over him like the water that pounded down from above. "You're going to boil yourself," Hannibal said, stepping close and reaching behind Will to adjust the knob.

"Still can't get warm." Will winced as the water cooled off a bit.

"We'll have to try something else." Hannibal retrieved a natural sea sponge from the shelf and anointed it with some kind of delicious-smelling soap. He worked it into a lather, then gently drew it across Will's chest. Will recognized the smell as part of the tapestry of scent that Hannibal wove around himself, a mixture of his products and his own natural essence.

Hannibal tilted Will's chin with a gentle press of his index knuckle, and massaged the sponge against his throat a moment before drawing it down over one shoulder. Now the other side. Hannibal's expression was placid, patient, paying attention to what he was doing, allowing Will to simply watch him, taking in the entirety of his body which was now tantalizingly warm and wet.

Hannibal put a hand on Will's hip and turned him around, massaging the sponge over the back of his shoulders, along his spine, and then lower. He knelt behind Will and drew it over the rise of Will's backside, caressing one cheek, then the other. Will's eyes unfocused, but he didn't dare close them, choosing instead to let the pattern of the stone and tile melt into a taupe blur in front of him. At last, the water seemed to have some effect, bringing warmth back to his body as Hannibal swiped the sponge down the backs of his thighs, into the hollow of his knees, and up again over his calves.

Hannibal's lathered hand snuck between and rubbed gently along his crevice. Will jumped, then relaxed, leaning forward and resting his forehead on the smooth shower wall, pressing his hands against it as well. Hannibal continued his fingers' exploration as he kissed Will's lower back, lingering over the dimples of his pelvis, licking at the outline of his spine where it met his tailbone, then lower. Will's first gasp and exhale was soft enough that it was swallowed by the sound of the pounding water, but the second echoed faintly against the angular surfaces of the bathroom's modern design. That Hannibal would put his mouth *there*, in the place on Will's body that was the most hidden and intimate, the source of every human's bodily shame, was a powerful aphrodisiac. Heat flooded his body, chasing away the chills and tremors in a powerful rush, and he couldn't stop the satisfied sounds that snuck between his lips.

Hannibal grasped him by the hip with one hand, and curled the other around to the front to add another layer of stimulation. Will held himself back from thrusting forward, not wanting to break the perfect connection and recipe of sensations Hannibal had created. His hands tensed against the shower wall, trying to dig into the stone tiles as he panted, breath mingling with the shower's ever-present steam.

The heat in his body built up to a point where, yes, he felt like he was boiling. Hannibal disengaged, then put his mouth against the rise where Will's back arched into his buttock and pressed his teeth into the supple flesh, sucking at Will's hot, damp skin, just enough to hurt. Will climaxed in seconds, his body shaking for a different reason now.

Hannibal stood and took Will gently in his arms from behind, helping him stay standing, his touch even hotter than Will's burning skin already felt. Warmth seeped into his bones, bled through his organs, the sweetest relief imaginable as every pinprick of frost and chill at last evaporated.

"Better?" Hannibal asked, with the same languid interest one would use when asking how someone felt about the weather, or the amount of cream in their coffee.

Will, breathing heavily, could only nod. After a few moments, he managed to compose himself, and acknowledge the outline of Hannibal's desire that pressed against him from behind. He turned gently in Hannibal's arms so they were face to face, and put a hand on the back of Hannibal's head, drawing him in for a kiss. With his free fingers, he reached down and drew them along Hannibal's length. Hannibal made a helpless little sound, and it brought a smile of triumph to Will's face that was quickly eaten up in the insistent kiss they shared.

Will pulled back enough to say, "I know I'm not technically hosting this time, but..." He drew himself out of Hannibal's grip and got on his knees, sliding his hands along the plane of Hannibal's chest before taking him by the hips.

"I'm not in any position to stop you," Hannibal said, looking down at him with an amorous but unmistakably hungry gaze.

"No, you're... *really* not," Will confirmed with a playful half-smile before opening his mouth and taking him in.

Hannibal settled a gentle hand on Will's head, sliding his fingers through the soaked strands, a gentle caress that turned into a painful tug as he came. Ever the gentleman, he released Will's hair and held out a hand to guide Will to his feet. Will was pleased to note how flushed Hannibal was, to feel the tremor in his hands as he pulled Will to him for a series of satisfied, hard-breathing kisses that ranged from his mouth to his neck and shoulder, and back again.

"I'm warm now," Will murmured into Hannibal's damp shoulder as Hannibal held him close.

"Good." Hannibal reached behind him and turned off the water. After a final kiss that lingered on the corner of Will's mouth, Hannibal handed him a towel before claiming one for himself. They dried off in dreamy, satisfied silence. Will caught sight of himself in the mirror and noted the mottled bruise on his lower back, livid in the center and ringed with teeth marks. It instilled a strange sense of pride. He felt marked, chosen, as Hannibal helped him into the black robe before tying the other around himself.

A fire crackled merrily in the bedroom's hearth. Hannibal had set up an entire silver tea service on the table in front of it, and pushed the two chairs closer together. Bach played softly from a nearby speaker. Hannibal ushered Will into his seat and poured him a cup, offering milk and sugar. Will, now warm and content, realized how hungry he was, and demolished the plate of delicate little tea cookies. Hannibal watched him, taking intermittent sips from his own gold-rimmed china cup.

"Tell me, Will." Hannibal broke the quiet. "What do you want for Christmas?"

Will laughed into his cup, almost doing a spit-take, which he knew Hannibal would disapprove of. "Haven't thought about it," he said. "You?"

Hannibal sipped his tea silently, and replaced it in the saucer with the tiniest sound. "More afternoons like this," he said, and there was something raw about his voice for a moment. It struck Will like tonguing an exposed nerve.

"Good choice. Put me down for that, too. Assuming, ah, that we're both — on the *nice* list."

Hannibal set down his cup and saucer and stood, retrieving Will's watch from the bathroom counter. He bent over and put his lips against Will's neck a moment before handing it back. "Your appointment is in twenty minutes," he said, crossing to a chest of drawers and pulling out another pair of boxer-briefs.

Will turned, brows knitted in confusion, as Hannibal drew them on and untied the robe. "My appointment?" he laughed disbelievingly. "We're still doing that?"

"Yes," Hannibal said simply, hanging up his robe and carefully unfolding his trousers, sliding in one leg, then the other.

Will smirked, tracing his thumb along his lower lip. "I get it. If you wanna bill my insurance, go ahead."

Hannibal gave him a disapproving look as he zipped up. "Finish your tea."

"You're serious." Will set his cup down with a rough clatter against the saucer. He got to his feet and went to where Hannibal was buttoning up his shirt. Will crossed his arms incredulously as Hannibal fastened the cuffs and straightened his collar before tucking the shirt tail into his waistband. Will reached out and pulled it free again with a few petulant tugs. "Unbelievable," he muttered as Hannibal stepped out of reach and tucked it back in once more.

"Explain your reluctance." Hannibal slid his tie free of the rack in the closet with the serpentine hiss of silk on silk.

"I think the treatment you just gave me was pretty effective," Will said, sinking onto the bed. He propped himself up on his elbow and pushed the robe open again.

"When I came into the bathroom to bring in your towel," Hannibal said to Will's reflection in the vanity mirror as he knotted his tie, "you were disassociating."

"No I wasn't," Will blurted the lie.

"You were seeing yourself as Garret Jacob Hobbs," Hannibal declared, adjusting the knot along the length of pale champagne silk.

Anger flared in Will's chest and he sat up like a shot, pulling the robe tighter around himself. "What if I was?"

"You are sliding into the skin of a dead man." Hannibal lifted an antique silver comb decorated with intricate floral designs and ran it through his mostly-dry hair. "I'd say we have some things to discuss."

"Hannibal," Will growled, getting to his feet and stalking over toward Hannibal's turned back, staring him down through their reflections in the mirror. "I know who I am," he insisted.

"Your knowledge comes and goes." Hannibal turned to him, buttoned and cinched and tied up in his clothes again, his eyes cool and clinical once more. "My aim is to bring back your power, Will. You have to be strong enough to reject Hobbs. Exorcize him."

"We'll need an old priest and a young priest I guess," Will snapped, turning away and heading for the bathroom and his clothes.

"Will."

Will paused, hand on the door.

"I know you resent the implication that you are losing yourself in Hobbs. In the remaining specter of him that stains your imagination." Hannibal crossed the room to put a hand on Will's cheek, cool against his flushed anger. "You feel helpless, and you're directing that frustration my way. That's why you called me Dr. Lecter at the end of our last session."

Will pulled away. "Isn't that what you are?" he asked quietly. "My psychiatrist?"

With that, he went into the bathroom and closed the door, fuming. Will yanked on his clothes and tied his shoes with quick, angry movements. When he emerged, running his fingers through his damp hair, Hannibal was gone. The tea tray had disappeared as well, and the door to the hall stood open, an invitation to follow. More like an order.

Gritting his teeth, Will went downstairs and found Hannibal waiting to drive him back to the office. Will stayed sullen and quiet for the journey, saying nothing as they arrived and went in. Hannibal waited patiently in his usual chair, and watched Will settle into the seat opposite. They marinated in Will's petulant silence, though Will felt his anger begin to abate. Hannibal wanted to help him. Maybe he knew what was best. The notion stripped some of Will's indignation away, but he remained stubbornly irritated that they weren't still in bed.

"Tell me about your mother," Hannibal said.

And... CUT.

Now, start the episode again, and enjoy watching the appointment with all the new subtext.

Stay tuned!

Season 1 Episode 5: Coquilles

Chapter Summary

This chapter takes place right after the infamous "did you just smell me?" scene. Will tells Hannibal he's considering zipping himself up in a sleeping bag to prevent sleepwalking, but it seems like a "poor man's straitjacket." That gets Hannibal thinking about restraining Will and...

Chapter Notes

Companion Song: "A Feast of Friends" — The Doors

"Do you know how pale and wanton thrillful / Comes death on a stranger hour / Unannounced, unplanned for / Like a scaring over-friendly guest you've / Brought to bed / Death makes angels of us all / And gives us wings / Where we had shoulders / Smooth as raven's claws"

This "cut unscene" begins at 30:23, just after Hannibal has smelled Will during their session, and remarked on his apparent marination in Old Spice. But let's be real – you know he was smelling encephalitis on Will, or at least knew something was wrong with him medically. But that's something to be dealt with in a future episode. Tonight will be special, but for another reason...

"Angel-Maker will be destroyed by what's happening inside his head; you don't have to be."

Will stared at the black stag figurine, contemplating the tines of its antlers. The animal's form swam in front of his eyes as they unfocused, not needed in the wake of his racing thoughts. *I have a choice*. But did he? If he refused Jack Crawford, denied the devil's bargain, relinquished the cursed gift, what was he left with? Teaching, of course -- but would anyone want to hear Will lecture, really consider what he had to say, if they knew he'd walked away, let people die because he couldn't handle the *stress*?

The world coalesced again and he was aware of Hannibal at his side, leaning in toward his neck. Will tensed in anticipation of... something. A kiss, a touch? Instead, he heard the slightest intake of breath through Hannibal's nose.

"Did you just *smell* me?" he demanded, a disappointed irritation infecting his inflection.

"Difficult to avoid."

Will scoffed incredulously. What the hell was that supposed to mean? He'd showered that morning. Hadn't he? Damn – he didn't remember. The days bled together with the nights—

"I really must introduce you to a finer aftershave," Hannibal said. "That smells like something with a ship on the bottle."

"Well, I keep getting it for Christmas," Will told him. In fact, the package from Aunt Louise had arrived the day before, the same one she sent every year, along with the obligatory Christmas card featuring a cartoon Nativity scene; the message inside always begged him to come and visit.

"Have your headaches been any worse lately? More frequent?"

"Yes, actually." Will moved away from the stag, from Hannibal, embarrassed about the Old Spice, and anxious about Hannibal's physical proximity.

"I'd change the aftershave," Hannibal suggested.

Will wandered over to Hannibal's desk, where an art book lay open to a full color print of *The Fall of the Rebel Angels*. "Be not afraid," he mused, flipping the pages for a moment. "That's what angels always say when they show up."

"Because they don't look like this." Hannibal approached the desk from the other side, indicating the painting in the book with a graceful hand motion. "According to Ezekiel, they have four faces: human, eagle, ox, and lion."

"Angel-Maker wouldn't enjoy something like that praying over him."

"It's no wonder depictions like this are more popular," Hannibal noted as he adjusted the lamp, casting more light on the print.

"A heavenly host that's a bit more, ah — *approachable*." Will sighed, glancing at his watch. "I guess I should..."

"Your comment about the poor man's straight jacket has inspired an idea," Hannibal said, stopping Will as he went to get his coat from where he'd abandoned it on the lounge.

Will laughed, a quiet, self-conscious little thing. "Oh?"

"Unless you are otherwise engaged this evening." Hannibal came to stand in front of him, close enough that Will could smell *him*, now. He had to admit Hannibal definitely knew a thing or two about aftershave. Today it was something warm and spicy, with an underlying floral note that still achieved a masculine aura. Missing was the chemical-alcohol tang that permeated his own product and others like it.

"I'm n-not. Engaged, that is." Will winced at the word's double meaning, though Hannibal's expression didn't change.

Hannibal put his hands over Will's, letting them linger for a few breaths before gently drawing the jacket out of Will's grasp and holding it up for him to put on. Will slid his arms in. Hannibal put on his own coat and led Will out to the Bentley, pausing only to see if Will followed. The ride was tense with charged anticipation. Will found himself talking about Max's last vet visit just to say something.

When they arrived, Hannibal escorted him to the living room and motioned for him to sit in front of the cold fireplace, then poured him a drink.

"I'll need a few minutes to prepare," he said, handing over the crystal glass of amber liquid. "Make yourself comfortable."

As if that was possible, considering where Will thought this evening was probably going. He nodded in assent, however, and watched Hannibal disappear into the shadows of his home, the sound of his steps evaporating after a few moments.

Though this was a fine sipping whiskey, Will drank it in one shot, and helped himself to another, trying to breathe through his nerves. *Just fucking relax,* he insisted to himself. *It's clear he wants you, so—*

Is it? The thought stopped him mid-drink. Yes, they'd slept together, a number of times now, but what the hell were they really *doing*? Will ran through a slideshow of his previous encounters with Hannibal, grasping desperately at meaning to pierce his self-doubt. At last, he lingered on what Hannibal had said last time they were together. *I would like more afternoons like this.* A simple statement, but it spoke volumes.

Did it?

"Shit," he muttered, struggling under the massive weight of things unsaid, undefined, unexplained.

Just then, Hannibal reappeared. "This way," he said with an easy smile, holding out his hand toward the darkened hallway. Will finished his drink and left the glass next to the others on the sideboard. Hannibal ushered him upstairs to the bedroom, where the lights were dimmed. A fire glowed in the hearth, throwing a comfortable heat, and he'd lit a handful of carefully-placed white candles that emitted a gentle scent, something with vanilla.

"This is, uhm..." Will stuttered as Hannibal went to the iPod dock and selected some music, soft and classical, no surprise there. They met before the fireplace, the warmth soaking into one side of Will's already flushed body, bringing a sheen of perspiration to his brow. "I don't know," he finished helplessly.

"Relaxing, I hope," Hannibal said, having stopped just out of Will's reach. "Comfortable."

"It's uh... nice," Will agreed, then pressed his mouth shut, running his top teeth along the inside of his bottom lip.

"You often hunger for comfort." Hannibal inched closer, the lively hearth casting gold and shadow on the side of his face, undulating as he moved.

"Everybody does, I guess." Will felt the hairs on his neck raise the closer Hannibal came.

"And many feel driven to provide it. Comfort in giving others comfort." Hannibal closed the distance, extending a pale hand. He slipped two fingers beneath Will's shirt, where the final button clasped, and hooked them inside of the waistband of his jeans. The flesh of Will's midsection trembled where those two fingers pressed against it.

"What do you mean?" Will's voice was low, hushed, as if they might be discovered any second; by whom, he didn't know.

"Providing comfort is not a selfless act." Hannibal eased forward, sliding his hand out of Will's waistband and along the skin of his lower back, the other resting gently on his chest, buffered by

Will's vest, sweater, and dress shirt, so many infuriating layers. Will tentatively put his hands on Hannibal, desperate for the touch but unsure of himself at this moment. "Easing the suffering of others brings a relief of suffering, and a sense of usefulness." He paused to lift his hand languidly from Will's pectoral to his throat, tracing his fingertips from where it met the shoulder up under his chin, then behind his head, grasping at his hair. "May I indulge myself, Will?"

"Y-yes," Will stammered, before taking a steadying breath. He put his hand on the side of Hannibal's angular face, drawing him even closer, his word whispering over Hannibal's lips. "Please."

"Comfort requires a measure of trust," Hannibal said, "for all involved." He erased the tiny distance that remained, beginning a kiss that lasted for many long moments, starting gently, peaking in passion, and releasing back into softness. All the while, Hannibal's hand roamed from the thick of Will's hair back to the curves of his throat, perhaps feeling for his pulse, tracing the flesh reverently.

"Part of me still can't believe we're doing this," Will admitted when the kiss broke and Hannibal eased open the zipper on his vest. "Can't believe... *I'm* doing this."

"All because you felt pressured to be sociable," Hannibal commented, eyes on his work. He set Will's vest on the nearby chair and snuck his fingers beneath the wool sweater. "It seems we too have developed a pattern of behavior." Now the buttons of Will's plaid dress shirt, one at a time, until he eased the collar apart and slid the fabric along Will's arms, letting it fall at their feet. "Despite each of us being in a compromising position." He kissed along Will's collarbone as Will put his hands gingerly on Hannibal's waist.

"A pattern. Is that what we're calling it?" Will breathed, then inhaled sharply as Hannibal nipped the skin just under the corner of his jaw. Will responded in a sudden passionate motion, reaching behind Hannibal to grasp him by the backside and lower ribs. Hannibal made a delighted, surprised noise around the asphyxiating kiss as Will dragged him toward the bed and pressed him down with his hips. He supported himself with one arm, and used the opposite hand to take a handful of the fine fabric of Hannibal's shirt and twist it as he probed Hannibal's mouth more deeply.

"You taste so good," Will confessed, pulling back after several long moments. He licked his lip as Hannibal's hands stole out to touch his neck and wind around his back.

"You have no idea," Hannibal told him, again with that raw-nerve edge to his voice, "how delicious you are."

Will came at him again. Hannibal pulled back a bit, just out of reach. "Interesting. Even in this moment you won't give up control."

Will put a hand in Hannibal's hair and gave it a little tug, angling his head back. "Why should I?"

Hannibal smiled, and there was a strange *knowing* in it. "I told you Angel-Maker is looking for the ultimate comfort. That sweet and easy peace."

"Doesn't exist. And you're talking way too much," Will said, his words muffled as he buried his mouth against Hannibal's cool throat, guiding his tongue down to its hollow, pleased with himself as Hannibal clung to him in sudden ecstasy, leaving stinging scratches along his shoulder blades. It brought another wave of pressure and urgency to the already sensitive areas of his body.

Swiftly, Hannibal forced him onto his back, wrists pressed against the mattress. "You're wrong, Will."

Will pushed against him and managed to raise his arms an inch or two before Hannibal leaned into him with more force.

"Am I?" he breathed into Hannibal's lips before receiving the kiss he offered.

Hannibal pulled back and sat up on Will's hips, at last casting off his jacket and loosening his tie as Will assisted as best he could from a supine position, working buttons loose. "Angel-Maker wants the promised endless peace of heaven," Hannibal said, sliding free of his vest and shirt, back-lit by the flickering firelight. Will clasped his thighs with both hands, sliding his thumbs closer and closer to where they met. "He seeks its immortal succor. You accept the impossibility that this feeling can exist at all. And that is where you're wrong, Will."

Will bent at the waist and Hannibal let him up, cupping the back of Will's head as he moved his mouth against Hannibal's nipples, one, then the other, rewarded within moments as they stiffened. He brushed the left with his teeth. Hannibal sucked in a breath of pain, pulling Will's head forcefully away from himself by the hair. "That sweet and easy peace exists," Hannibal claimed. "Though it is fleeting. Short-lived, but not, as you insist, impossible."

He fixed a hand on Will's chest and pushed him back on the bed. Will growled in frustration. "Stop fighting me," Hannibal said, "and I'll show it to you." He reached back behind Will and drew something forward from the crease where the mattress met the headboard.

Will glanced back. Hannibal had pulled a black rope free. It had a slip knot at one end, the other presumably attached to something beneath the bed frame. Hannibal then retrieved a matching one on the other side.

Will felt his face go white. "I'm not... I've never...," he managed, taking a little jagged breath in.

Hannibal cocked his head, an amused smile climbing gently over his graceful features. "Your first time?"

Will felt shame creep up and stain his bloodless face again. "C'mon. Stop fucking around and come here." Will tried to pull Hannibal down on top of him, but Hannibal resisted, and wrapped an impossibly strong hand around his wrist, guiding it into the knot of the rope.

"Let go, Will," Hannibal advised. "You spend every hour – waking or dreaming – desperate for control over your mind and your body. You only feel safe stalking the fields at night, looking back at your house like it's a lone ship on a black sea."

Hearing his own words echoed back to him startled Will into compliance. He let Hannibal secure the rope on one side, then the other, sliding the knots tight.

"Feel safe here, now," Hannibal said, shifting off the bed to admire his handiwork. Will glanced at the ropes that held his wrists and gave them an exploratory pull. The cordage was light but strong, and there was enough slack that he could move around, maybe be able to bite the knots free. It would take time. Time that he was sure Hannibal wasn't going to give him. As Hannibal regarded him coolly from the side of the bed, Will felt his tensed muscles relax, and the rise of panic in his chest seeped back like a receding tide. In its wake was a sense of calm, and an aching desire that made him want to crawl out of his own skin.

"That's it," Hannibal said, stroking his cheek. "Let go." Gently, he unclasped Will's remaining clothing, and slid him free of it. Will watched his face as Hannibal regarded him, bare in the firelight, before removing the rest of his own clothing with little ceremony.

Slowly, Hannibal pressed against him. So much skin on his skin, warm, velvety flesh, the surface satiny but the form beneath hard and unyielding. Lost in the sensation, Will almost forgot the terror of being so prone and exposed until it came roaring back at the touch of teeth at his neck. He pulled hard against his restraints, and was rewarded with a groan of something in the bed frame.

Hannibal lifted his face away from Will's neck and rose up on his hands. "Give in, Will."

"Let me go." His voice was small in his throat.

Hannibal ignored him, sliding one hand down Will's chest, then over his navel, tracing along the line of hair that led south. Will's rapid breaths slowly mellowed, and his tensed muscles relaxed as Hannibal kissed him gently on the mouth. Hannibal's hand traveled lower and touched him in a sudden intimate caress. Will exhaled sharply, straining against his bonds one last time before dissolving his resistance.

"You don't have to be strong. You don't have to think. Just feel." Hannibal stroked him a moment longer, then rolled away. Will exhaled in frustration, opening his eyes to see Hannibal pull something out of his bedside drawer and moisten his hand with it.

"I know the loss of bodily autonomy scares you." Hannibal settled next to him again. "However, there are some involuntary aspects of anatomy that can be rewarding."

Will gasped when Hannibal touched him again with his slicked hand, confident fingers moving farther and farther back before circling his opening. "Let me in," Hannibal requested, leaning over to kiss where his shoulder met his neck.

Will closed his eyes and forced himself to breathe, then relax into Hannibal's hand. It was a terrible strain not to jump when the finger went in, but he managed to keep his reaction at bay. His rigid limbs softened as Hannibal began moving his finger and Will couldn't stop the soft moan that erupted from his lips as it found his target. Will was so focused on staying relaxed that the pleasure crept up on him before it pounced, sinking in its teeth and claws. His hands closed around the ropes that held his wrists in a sudden death grip and he arched his back reflexively. The intensity spread through every part of his body instead of staying localized in the usual place, glowing along his nerves like divine light released from a painted saint's halo.

Breathing hard, Will came back to himself in increments. His vision faded in and he saw Hannibal looking down at him with a gentle smile. As he'd done before, Hannibal took them both in one hand, the sensitive undersides touching, and began to move. Unbelievably, Will came again, something he didn't know was possible, seizing beneath Hannibal, who leaned over him to press their mouths together once more. A second warming sensation on his belly as Hannibal finished, breathing just as hard.

Hannibal settled over him, torso between Will's legs, head resting on his chest, cradling him. "Did you feel it?" he asked softly, breath tickling over Will's dampened skin. "That moment of sweet and easy peace?"

"I'm still feeling it," Will told him, a breathless whisper.

He felt Hannibal's smile against the flesh of his chest. They lay in this position for a long time. Will faded in and out until he couldn't stand the loss of circulation in his hands and shifted uncomfortably.

Hannibal arose from where he rested. "Forgive the wait," he said. Will slid back to provide some slack, and Hannibal freed his hands. Will sat up, rubbing his wrists. He was lucky it was cold out – there were clear ligature marks left behind that he'd need to cover up. His watch would do on one side, but not the other.

Hannibal knelt next to him, lifting one of Will's hands to his mouth and kissing the bruised place beneath his thumb. "Don't move," he requested, getting out of bed. Will watched him go to the bathroom and return with a damp cloth, which he used to help them each clean up a bit. Then they slid between the sheets and under the thick duvet.

Hannibal kissed him and folded their bodies together, closing his eyes. It was late, and Will knew he was dangerously close to succumbing to sleep. "Hannibal?"

"Yes, Will." Hannibal didn't open his eyes.

"Maybe you shouldn't have let me go." He paused, then said, "I-I might, uh – wander."

Hannibal shifted, drawing Will to himself from behind, stretching one arm out for Will to rest his head against. The other he closed around Will's chest in a tight grip. "No, you won't," he vowed, pressing his cheek against the back of Will's neck.

He inhaled deeply. "I prefer to smell myself on you, rather than that offensive aftershave," he said, and Will laughed exhaustedly before drifting off.

***

The night was raven-dark, no moon, no stars. Between the thick, ancient trees came the intermittent flicker of fire. Will walked toward the flames, their sparks calling him closer as they rose into the leafy canopy above. He reached out a hand and rested it on the velvet-soft hide of the black stag that stalked at his side, caressing its neck, slipping his fingers through its fur with languid strokes.

The woods broke open, revealing a small clearing ringed with trees. Stretched between these trees were ropes, the cordage elevating a series of corpses between the trunks. The dead were up-lit by a crackling bonfire in the center of the grove, the orange light revealing what had befallen them. Each was naked, their backs flayed open, every rib cracked away from the spine to reveal the lungs. The excess skin was stretched out from the torso, held by slender cords that ensured the wings were spread, ready for flight.

"These are not angels," he said.

"No."

Will turned to see Garret Jacob Hobbs step out of the woods, dead and riddled with bullet holes. He stood at Will's side and offered him a knife, an ancient artifact, a tool of sacrifice from a lost civilization.

"Not angels," Hobbs said. "Eagles."

Will forced himself to look at the flayed corpses again, and a wave of cold dread saturated him to his bones. He knew them, all of them – some were students from the academy. There was Beverly Katz, and his Aunt Louise–

"Dad!" A girl's voice rang out like a silver bell through the twisting shadows cast by the bonfire.

Will and Garret Jacob Hobbs both turned to see Abigail, who had somehow appeared at the edge of the clearing. In front of her was a flat rock, about waist-high, a natural table. An altar, Will realized, inscribed with runes and stained with blood.

Jack Crawford, stripped to the waist, was tied to the altar, his back exposed, waiting for Will's knife. He struggled vainly against his bonds, cursing them. "Will!" he bellowed. "Cut me loose!"

The stag pressed its velvet nose against Will's neck, nuzzling him a moment before nudging him forward a few more steps until he stood opposite Abigail, Jack between them.

"Will you show me how to do it?" Abigail requested, an innocent smile climbing over her girlish features. She nodded to Garret. "He taught me. He taught me how to field dress them. The deer. And the girls."

"God, no," Will whispered. The words lost in Jack's demands that Will cut him free.

"But you can teach me this," Abigail said. "Please, Dad. I want to learn."

And he wanted to teach her. Be her patient instructor, show her where to cut, and how to unzip the ribs from the spine. He would show her the lungs, and together they would hoist the body into the trees. Her careful little fingers would be perfect to hook the flesh just so to create the wings.

"They are not people," Garret Jacob Hobbs told him, curling a freezing, spongy-fleshed hand on his bare shoulder. "They are betrayers. Which means they're nothing but... animals. Animals we do not honor every part of."

"The eagles need to fly, Dad. We need to help them," Abigail said, holding out her hand for the knife.

"Will!" Jack roared, sweat glistening on his exposed flesh, giving it a desperate glow in the firelight. "Will, I'm sorry! I shouldn't have pushed you! I shouldn't have made you look!"

"Jack — hold on, it's okay." Will pushed Hobbs aside and knelt next to the stone altar. He sawed at the ropes that held Jack in place stomach-down. The strands of rustic rope parted one at a time.

"Ugh, Dad, come on," Abigail drawled over the altar. She crossed her arms and rolled her eyes.

As soon as the last strand of rope popped free, Jack reared up on his knees. He turned to Will with a sinister smile, and leapt on him, crushing him to the ground with his heavier weight.

"Told you," Abigail sighed, moving to stand next to her dead father.

"Betrayer," Garret added.

"Jack, stop!" Will pleaded as Jack peeled the knife from Will's grasp. Will struggled against him, his training coming back to him. He braced his hip, locked his hand under Jack's opposite arm and

shifted his weight, bringing the larger man beneath him. Jack slashed out with the knife but Will grabbed his wrist, forcing it back against the ground.

Jack went limp suddenly, staring up into Will's eyes, his own reflecting the red-orange glow of the pagan bonfire, catching the pinprick-sparks as they rose into the cosmic-black sky. "Will," he said. "Wake up."

Will ignored him, grabbing the other wrist and pressing it to the ground as well, locking his legs around Jack's hips and waist and squeezing in with his knees to ensure Jack couldn't move. "You shouldn't have pushed me," he snarled down into Jack's now-placid face. "You made me like them. Look at what you made, Jack, look at it! It's your turn to look!"

"Will." Jack's voice was soft, gently insistent. But that wasn't Jack's voice, was it?

"Will. You're dreaming."

Hannibal's voice coming from Jack's lips.

"You're safe. Wake up."

"Will."

Jack's face faded from his view like a flame smothered under a glass until it winked out. The edges of the world feathered back into sight and he reeled with the disorientation of being transported back to Hannibal's bed.

He had Hannibal pinned under him, wrists against the mattress. Will's legs quaked from the force he exerted against Hannibal's hips.

"Wake up, Will." Hannibal's words were an order, but his voice was serene, unhurried. "Can you hear me?"

Will nodded, sweat dripping down from his hairline. Air suddenly rushed into his lungs and he gasped, releasing his hold and rocking back on his heels.

Hannibal sat up as well, running a cool, gentle hand along the burning muscle of Will's thigh as Will rubbed his face desperately. He dropped his hands and looked at Hannibal, who reached out to run his knuckles down the side of Will's cheekbone.

"Am I awake?" he rasped, throat dry, seared with the panic and terror that still soaked his veins.

"Yes," Hannibal assured him.

"A-are... are you sure?" Will felt like his chest was constricting in on his organs, smaller and smaller, restricting his breathing. *I'm going to break. I'm going to break. I'm going to fucking break.*

"I promise, Will. And I never promise lightly."

Will felt himself collapse, weak with relief. Hannibal held him close, reclining him back onto the pillows, passing a soothing hand over his damp brow, fingers curling through his hair. Will clung to him before slowly relaxing his grip, allowing Hannibal's promise of reality to uncoil his muscles and his thoughts. He still felt unanchored, adrift, alternately burning hot and clammy-cold. He kept

running his fingertips through the hair on Hannibal's chest, focusing on the sensation, trying to memorize the curve of Hannibal's shoulder against the dim bedroom backdrop.

"I'm... so sorry," he said at last, sitting up to drag his hands over his face again. "Please say... I didn't hurt you. Did I hurt you?"

"Not at all," Hannibal assured him, a comforting hand on his back.

"What... happened?" Images roared past his mind's eye, cycling through the horrors of his nightmare. Blood angels. Blood *eagles*. Echoes refracted through him, eating away at the core of what he knew was real, who he thought he was.

Dad... will you show me how to do it?

"I woke up when you began to move," Hannibal told him, easing him back into bed by the shoulders. His firm grip dragged Will away from the nightmarish tableau only he could see. "And then you broke free and held me down. It took me a moment to realize you weren't awake."

It took Will a moment in turn to feel the press of Hannibal's outline against the place where his thigh rose into his cheek. He shifted, surprised.

"You'll have to excuse me, Will." Hannibal's words tickled his earlobe. "I initially thought it was foreplay."

Will turned in his arms and ran his hand over it. "It still could be."

Hannibal made a sound deep in his throat, a rumble of appreciation at Will's amorous touch and the apparent thrill of Will's lips descending on his forcefully. When Will broke away to lick a hot, wet line down Hannibal's neck, he said, "Any port in a storm?"

Will ignored the question, instead sliding down until he could bring Hannibal into his mouth, taking hold of both of Hannibal's wrists in his grip again, holding them against the bed as he worked. Despite the triumphant swell that gathered in him in response to the noises he was inspiring Hannibal to make, the dark backstage of his mind was busy with living shadows. And the knowledge that, yes, he was lost at sea, desperate for an anchor, for a sheltered cove.

When Hannibal came, he pulled out of Will's grip as if it was nothing, clamping his hands around Will's wrists instead, digging steely fingers into the bruises left behind by the ligatures. It hurt, but the pain was welcome. It demanded to be acknowledged. It was real.

When Hannibal's grip loosened, Will sat up and rubbed his wrists a moment before finding his place in Hannibal's arms again. When Hannibal regained his breath, he kissed Will gently, first on the mouth, then on the forehead. "Tell me your dream," he requested, but Will could tell he was half asleep already.

"Tomorrow," he evaded, closing his eyes.

"You saw angels." It wasn't a question.

Will murmured in assent.

Hannibal pulled him closer. "Be not afraid," he said.

And... CUT.

Now, start the episode again, and see if Will and the Scooby Gang can catch the Angel-Maker.

Stay tuned!

Season 1 Episode 6: Entrée

Chapter Summary

Hannibal has just read Freddie Lounds' article claiming that Abel Gideon is the Chesapeake Ripper. Hannibal's pride won't stand for it. Meanwhile, Beverly talks Will into 5$ margarita night at a dance club. They play marry/fuck/kill for their coworkers. When Will gets home, he finds Hannibal waiting for him, with an agenda...

Chapter Notes

Companion Song: "What Kind of Man" – Florence + the Machine

"To let me dangle at a cruel angle... / You do such damage, how do you manage? / Trying to crawl in back for more / And with one kiss / You inspired a fire of devotion... What kind of man loves like this?"

This "cut unscene" occurs after Will, Jack, and Alana meet with Freddie Lounds, asking her to run a story suggesting there's more evidence pointing to Abel Gideon as the Chesapeake Ripper. The idea is that the article will infuriate the real Ripper, and he'll lash out, perhaps making a mistake that will help the FBI catch him. Alana uses her influence with Chilton to get Freddie an interview with Abel that we see the beginning of. Cut to Hannibal reading the article on his iPad, very clearly pissed off, the most we've seen him emote in the entire series so far. Cue this scene, which operates presuming that all of these events happened in the same day – the meeting with Lounds in the morning, Lounds meeting with Gideon that afternoon, and publishing the story that evening for Hannibal to read.

Will caught movement in his peripheral vision, a jagged shadow on the wall. He looked up from his darkened computer screen and saw it – the black stag, standing in the doorway of the lecture hall. He held his breath and forced himself to *really* look at it, taking in the details. The creature pawed at the floor, and he could hear the rasp of hoof against tile. The fluorescent lighting of the hall showed him attributes he hadn't noticed previously. The creature had fur, to be sure, but feathers as well, raven-black. They ruffled along the stag's neck and shimmered down its haunches.

The stag lifted its head and motioned down the hallway as if its snout was a pointing finger. Will felt himself stand and walk with purpose over to the doorway, passing into the hall just in time to see the stag round a corner. He followed, limbs heavy as if he walked through water or on the surface of an unknown planet, until the creature disappeared into the forensics lab. He stood at the door to the morgue, searching for it, but it was gone, no shadows to hide in. This room was all steel and bright lights–

"Hey!"

Will startled out of his reverie, an entire body shock.

"Ground control to Major Tom. Hello...?"

Will turned to see Beverly Katz shut one of the chrome doors of the mortuary refrigerator and turn back to him. "You forget your ear protection at the firing range or something?"

"Uhm..." So this wasn't a dream?

"You don't want tinnitus, trust me. My brother got it playing in a punk band in college, and it still bothers him." Beverly stripped off her gloves and tossed them in the trash.

"Were they any good?"

Will's head shot up to see Jimmy and Zeller working on the other side of the room, Zeller with his eye pressed against a microscope and Jimmy brushing fibers from a bloody shirt. He hadn't seen *anyone* when he came in, the room appearing at first to be completely deserted as he tried to track the stag.

Will rubbed his face and looked again. Everyone was still there.

Bev answered Jimmy's question with a laugh and a, "No. And they had a really stupid name, too. Let's see, what was it — Psychotic Bicycle Thieves."

"There's a special place in hell for someone who steals bikes," Zeller said, eye still attached to the microscope. "Then you're stuck with no ride home, standing there in your helmet like an idiot."

"Hence the psychotic," Jimmy said, picking a hair off of the shirt with tweezers.

"All right, pack it up, guys." Beverly removed her apron and tossed it in the laundry pile. "It's quittin' time. Thursday night, and you know what that means."

"It's Friday Eve?" Jimmy suggested, securing the hair in a sample case.

"No, it's five dollar jumbo margaritas at Hacienda Las Glorias." Beverly shrugged on a maroon leather jacket, flipping her long hair out from beneath it. "And you," she said, approaching Will and elbowing him gently, "are my DD."

"Y-you want me to drive you there?" Will blinked furiously and shook his head.

"Yeah, and home after," Beverly insisted. "I'd make Z do it, but last time I brought him he ditched me to go home with a cocktail waitress."

"Still a better choice than Freddie Lounds," Will said, then snapped his mouth shut. That was supposed to be a silent comment in his head, not something said aloud. He wasn't even sure everyone knew that Zeller had been tricked into bed by the intrepid reporter in order to pump him for information on the Stammets murders. At least he'd gotten pumped for other things as well.

Beverly howled with laughter and Jimmy chuckled after an, "Oof! Yikes."

Zeller stood up from his stool. "Hey, fuck you, you sweaty little weirdo," he snapped.

"Down boy," Jimmy soothed, reaching out to grab Zeller's shoulder as he passed, presumably headed to Will to get in his face.

Zeller shot Will a death glare, then switched off the microscope and shrugged out of his lab coat.

"Jimmy, you in?" Beverly asked. "The sweaty little weirdo is driving."

"Alas, I have plans," Jimmy said, returning the shirt to its evidence bag. "Oliver, me, a glass of pinot greej, and my DVR full of *Dancing with the Stars*."

"Oh, your cat's named Oliver?" Zeller quipped as he pulled on his jacket as well.

"Very funny." Jimmy shot him a poisoned smile of annoyance. "For your information, he's moving in next month."

"All right, looks like it's you and me. C'mon." Beverly linked her arm through Will's and pulled him back into the hall, practically dragging him out of the Behavioral Science Unit.

"You're, ah – assuming that I don't have plans tonight," Will said as they walked quickly through the chilly wind towards the parking lot.

"Of course you don't." Bev broke away from him to stand by the passenger's side of his Volvo.

"Is it that obvious?" Will unlocked the car and they got inside.

"Uh, yeah," Beverly said through a snarky smirk. "Just a little bit."

"Where's this place?"

She gave him the address and described the part of town as he pulled out of the lot. "You'll hate it," she promised. "They've got a dance floor and sometimes there's karaoke."

"Sounds... fun," Will tried.

Beverly just laughed, running her hand through her inky black hair. "Don't get too excited. No, you'll definitely hate it. But I'll buy you the best chimichanga you ever had."

"Deal." Will smiled at the road through the windshield as Beverly played around with his radio. This felt good. Ever since Beverly had approached him to ask him if he was okay during the Angel-Maker case, he'd found himself more drawn to her. When they'd first met he'd found her caustic and abrasive, borderline unprofessional. Now that he knew she only gave people shit if she liked them, he enjoyed her brash wit. And his accuracy with his service weapon had increased exponentially since she'd coached him.

"There it is." Beverly pointed out a large stucco building with red clay roof tiles that sat at the edge of a strip mall. As if Will could have missed it – the entire side of the structure facing the street supported a huge twist of glowing neon that read HACIENDA LAS GLORIAS FOOD DRINK DANCE. They were lucky to get a spot in the jam-packed parking lot and even luckier to get a cafe table near the bar with a good view of the dance floor. Will tried to order a beer, but Beverly interrupted and told the waitress to bring two jumbo margs and a chimichanga platter.

"The trick is," Beverly told him as the server left to put in their order, "you only eat *half* the chimichanga. Otherwise you're too full to dance."

"Then I'm eating the whole thing," Will said, leaning closer in order to be heard over the loud reggaeton music.

"You are bound and determined not to have any fun, aren't you?" Beverly scolded him, then grinned as the server set two soup-bowl sized margaritas on the table, along with a basket of chips and a little carafe of salsa. "That's what I'm talkin' 'bout." She lifted her precarious glass and looked at him pointedly until he raised his as well, spilling some of the icy lime-green liquid over the side onto his hand. "To *Tattlecrime,* and a certain red-haired vixen. May they help us slay the beast."

"I'm not drinking to *Tattlecrime*," Will said flatly.

"All right, to Thursday then," Beverly relented.

"Friday Eve," Will corrected and she laughed.

Beverly took a long, hearty sip before setting the glass back on the table with a satisfied sigh. "That's better."

Will took a tentative drink and coughed. "That's terrible."

"Oh, please, what do you want for five dollars?" She took another gulp. "It's supposed to get you drunk, not be a–a gourmet carnival of *flavors*."

"I thought I was driving."

"Whatever. Fine. God forbid you have a good time," Beverly dismissed, scooping up a mouthful of salsa with her chip and crunching it with relish. "I know I gave Zeller shit about ditching me here to get laid, but if you happen to get lucky and I have to take a cab home, I'll get over it."

Tequila made him flush, apparently. Or maybe it was this conversation. He hoped it was dark enough that she wouldn't see.

"You really shouldn't poke Zeller about the Freddie Lounds thing." Beverly brushed chip crumbs off the table and took another long pull on the margarita's straw. "Don't get me wrong, that was funny as hell, but, y'know, he actually feels really bad about that. I keep telling him it could have happened to any of us." She took another drink. "Maybe not you," she added.

"Why, because I'm a good judge of character?"

Beverly shrugged. "I feel like you've studied enough monsters that you'd spot evil intentions a mile away."

The chimichanga arrived and they tucked in after Beverly ordered another margarita.

"Why is this so good?" Will demanded between bites. "I feel like this place shouldn't have decent food."

"I told you it was the best," Beverly reminded him with her mouth full.

After the platter was demolished and another margarita had disappeared into Beverly (Will did wonder where she put it all, considering how slender she was) coworkers came up again. "I know Z seems like a douchebag," Beverly said, wiping her hands on a paper napkin, "but he's actually a decent dude."

"Could've fooled me," Will muttered as the waitress took the empty plate away and provided Will with his requested ice water.

"Well, take this for example – even though Freddie Lounds used him like that, he still won't tell me if the carpet matches the drapes."

Will almost shot water out of his nose, and took several more gulps to stop coughing.

"What? You know you're curious." Beverly licked margarita salt from the rim of her glass. "But he won't spill. Says a gentleman wouldn't tell."

"Jesus, Bev," he said, and couldn't stop himself from laughing when she cracked up.

"Hey, I'll be right back." Beverly slid off the stool and headed for the restrooms. Will watched the soccer match on one of the jumbo TVs until she returned.

"Wow." Will's eyes widened as she slid into her seat after draping her jacket over the back of her chair. Beverly had swapped her plain burgundy v-neck for a tank top embroidered with silver and purple beads and sequins. Almost on cue, the lights in the restaurant lowered and the music kicked up another notch, shifting from salsa and reggaeton to straight-up club fare.

"What? I had it in my purse," Beverly explained, drawing her hair into a high ponytail. Colored lights washed the empty floor now, and people were leaving their tables to fill it with margarita-fueled dance moves. "C'mon, this is a good song."

"You go right ahead. I'll be here."

"You suck, Will. Get up, let's go." She tugged at his arm.

"No," he said flatly.

"Miss?" Beverly signaled the waitress. "Please get this man another margarita so he can get the stick out of his ass."

"Will do!" the waitress called over her shoulder as she returned to the bar with a tray of empties.

"There is not enough tequila in this world–" Will argued.

"Okay, fine," Beverly cut in. "If you won't dance, let's play a game. Marry, fuck, kill. People we work with."

Will laughed so hard his eyes watered. Once he'd wiped them clear, the threatened margarita had appeared before him. "Okay," he relented as Beverly grinned mischievously at him over her own drink. "Fine. Though, ah... *completely* inappropriate, considering we catch murderers. We really shouldn't be talking about who we'd like to kill."

"Whatever, you go first."

"Absolutely not," Will shot back.

"Nothing leaves this table, promise!"

"No," Will insisted, crossing his arms.

"God, fine!" Beverly growled. "Okay. Kill... Crawford. Just because he's so damn stubborn. And I don't like how hard he pushes you sometimes." Will's heart flickered with warmth. "Fuck — oh, that's easy. Have you seen Ignacio from HR?"

Will shook his head no.

"Smokin' hot," Beverly insisted. "He's bald but it looks *sooooo* good on him. Great big brown eyes. You should make up some reason to get an appointment with him just to check him out."

"I don't think I need to make up a reason to see HR," Will said darkly, but Beverly breezed right by his comment.

"And marry..." Bev took a drink as she thought. "Who's that psychiatrist with the long brown hair? I'm shit with names. Flower something...?"

"Alana Bloom," he said quickly, then winced. That had sounded over-eager.

"Right, Dr. Bloom." If Beverly noticed him brightening at the name she made no indication. "Totally marry her." She polished off another margarita and punctuated it with a little burp. "She's cute and she doesn't seem crazy. And I bet she cooks. Like I'd come home from a long day at the lab and she'd have a pot roast or a meatloaf ready."

"You're in the market for... a housewife?" Will was incredulous.

Beverly snorted. "Please. I'm just tired of frozen dinners and takeout. Then again, being married to a psychiatrist seems like bad news bears. They'd be like, analyzing you all the time."

Will thought inadvertently of Hannibal, but Beverly distracted him immediately by saying, "I think she likes you," and dropping a sly wink over her enormous green beverage.

"Who?"

"Dr. Bloom."

Will's stomach fluttered. "W-what makes you say that?"

"One time I saw you pass her in the hall outside Jack's office and she totally checked out your ass," Beverly told him behind her hand, as if someone was listening — as if they weren't practically shouting over the music. "And then she noticed that I noticed, and her cheeks went *bright* fucking red." She cackled, scooping up another tortilla chip. "Are you gonna drink that or fondle it?"

Will realized he was tracing his fingers around the base of the sweating margarita glass. He leaned in and put his mouth on the straw and pretended to drink.

"Okay. Your turn. Marry, fuck, kill, Behavioral Science edition, let's go."

Will sat back and rolled his eyes. "I don't know. Everyone you said."

"You've never even seen Ignacio!" Beverly shouted through a mouthful of chips.

"But you describe him so well." Will raised a sardonic eyebrow.

"You play this game or you dance, *Special Agent Graham*," Beverly threatened him, emphasizing her point by throwing a broken chip at him. It bounced off of his chest.

"Kill Zeller," he said immediately and Beverly heaved a great sigh. "I'd, uh — marry..." he sighed heavily. "Jimmy," he finished through a wry smile. "You wanna come home to meatloaf, I wanna come home to... peace. Something simple."

"White wine and *Dancing with the Stars*?"

"Sure. Why not. Though I don't think it'd last."

"Why, 'cuz you're unstable?" Beverly twirled her fingers briefly through her ponytail.

He scoffed. "Because he's a cat person. Thanks for that, though."

"My pleasure," she said with a vaudevillian wink. "Now for the good part. Who you doin' the dirty with?"

"Uhm..." Flashes of Hannibal, sense-memories of his taste and touch stumbled through his mind, bringing a sudden unavoidable rush of blood to an inconvenient place. "Alana Bloom, I guess," he said hurriedly. "Since, according to you, she, ah... might be *amenable*."

"Solid choices. Though if you're gonna propose to Jimmy, you better do it soon. Oliver's moving in. Allegedly. Are you gonna drink that thing or what?"

"You want it?" He slid the drink towards her.

"No! I'm trying to get you to loosen up and live a little!" Beverly demonstrated by draining her glass. "At least drink enough so that when I ask you if you're doing okay with everything Jack's putting you through, you'll actually answer me this time." Beverly sighed, sucking at the dregs of her margarita, the straw sounding as annoyed as she did. "You told me that if you were struggling, nobody would ever know. So now I'm asking, okay?"

Will pinched the bridge of his nose where his glasses normally rested. What the hell was he supposed to say? It was all so hard to explain — the sleepwalking, the dreams, losing time, envisioning himself as Garret Jacob Hobbs — where the hell should he even *start*? If he told her everything, it'd be the last time she was foolish enough to ask after his well-being, much less invite him out for drinks. And as much time as he'd spent protesting and dragging his heels all night, he hoped it wouldn't be the last time they were together outside of work.

What it boiled down to was that there was really only one person who could see the whole picture and not run screaming in the other direction. That person was Hannibal Lecter.

"I can handle it. Work, I mean," he started, then stopped, struggling for words. "I— when... when I asked you if I seemed different it's because I... I've been distracted by something — *someone*."

Beverly's eyes sparkled in the kaleidoscopic lights thrown at them from the busy dance floor, and her mouth split into a wide grin. "No way. No fucking way — you-you're *seeing* someone!"

"N-no," Will protested. "I mean — yeah, but..."

"Okay, so it's complicated," Beverly provided, making a circular motion with her hand that encouraged Will to keep talking. "Is it serious?"

"I don't know," Will admitted.

"Are you guys exclusive?"

"I... don't know."

"What the fuck, Will? Who is this person, and are you dating or what?"

"I don't know!" he shouted, louder than he meant to.

Beverly leaned back and crossed her arms. "Well, that bodes well."

Will let out a harsh, frustrated sigh. "I don't know what it is. One night we got a little drunk and ended up — s-sleeping together, and then it happened again, and again — but we can't tell anyone."

"Whoa, wait — you aren't having an affair, are you? I mean, this person isn't married or anything?" Her eyes grew bigger. "Are you a *homewrecker*?"

"No," he insisted. "No, he's not married."

"Closeted?"

"I don't know, probably just as much as I am. Half-in-half-out."

"Jesus Christ. Complicated is an understatement." She leaned her chin on her hand. "So he doesn't call you his boyfriend?"

Office hours are for patients. My kitchen is always open to friends.

"N-no. Just his friend."

"So we're looking at a friends with benefits situation." Beverly shook her head, tsking. "Easy for that to get messy. Especially since it sounds like you two haven't set *aaaaaaany* boundaries whatsoever." Beverly reached out and put a hand over his where it rested on the tabletop. "Unsolicited advice time. Sit him down and talk about this. You should know where you both stand. If it's just for fun, and you're both on the same page, then go for it. But trust me, it's easy to catch feelings even if you don't mean to. And Will? You don't need one more thing dragging you down."

Will rubbed his face tiredly before looking at her again. "I'll take all of that under... advisement." A headache was brewing behind his eyes, egged along by the loud music. "It's getting late. We should go soon."

Beverly looked at her phone. "Yeah," she agreed. "'Spose so. But guess what? We're not leaving without at least one dance."

"Bev, have mercy," Will begged as she dragged him out of his seat with a surprisingly strong grip on his shoulder and arm.

"Just one song, and I'll pay the tab, I swear. Look, it's so packed out there that you won't have to do much more than kinda wiggle in place, right?"

"Christ. Okay, fine." Will abandoned his jacket on his stool and let Beverly pull him through the throng of gyrating bodies to the center of the floor, the bass pounding through him, simultaneously soothing like a lover's heartbeat and splittingly painful as it rocked through his head. Panic seized him as the bodies crushed in on all sides, bombarding him with different scents and sensations, a claustrophobic mass of alcohol-fueled flailing.

A couple of guys in tight shirts tried to dance up on Beverly, but she evaded them expertly and threw her arms around Will's neck. Will put his arms around her as well, tentatively, then with a tighter grip, just to hold on as the crowd surged around them.

Just when he thought he was going to have to make a break for it, something changed. The music and the lighting shifted as a different song started, one with a throbbing, darker beat, but there was a shift inside of him as well. Instead of feeling crushed by the other dancers, awkward and uncomfortable in Beverly's embrace, he felt cradled by all of it. Will couldn't stop the wide smile from spreading over his features as Beverly danced, throwing her head back and laughing, a portrait of uncomplicated joy.

The lights over the dance floor began to strobe, kicking up the contrast between light and shadow. He found himself laughing as well, and letting himself go unselfconsciously, nodding to the beat and letting Beverly's movements guide his own. Someone taller than him was grinding into his backside, snaking a hand around his hip, but he didn't care. In fact, it felt good. Honest. No thinking, no analysis, just instinct.

The black stag stepped out from behind the DJ booth and loped slowly along the edge of the dance floor, the flashes of white and colored light washing over its satiny hide, reflecting in nightmare shades on the sheen of its feathers.

"Will!"

It was Beverly shouting in his ear. Startled from his reverie, he looked down at her and then up again. The stag was gone, but the guy behind him was definitely not, trying to work a hand between Will and Bev.

"Fuck off!" Beverly threatened, and the guy, who Will hadn't even gotten a look at, let go and moved away. Beverly locked eyes with Will, her dark irises reflecting the dance lights much like the stag's hide had. "I wanna try something," she shouted over the music. "Just to make sure, okay?"

He nodded, and she pulled him in closer. Before he realized what was happening, they were kissing.

Beverly pulled back almost immediately.

"No," Will said, shaking his head.

"Nope," Beverly agreed with a smile. "Okay. Glad we figured that out. You ready to go?"

***

By the time he'd dropped Beverly off at her condo and driven back to Wolf Trap, it was late, almost midnight. He wasn't looking forward to getting up for work the next day, but knew he couldn't call in. Jack would drive out to the country and haul Will in by the scruff of his neck like he was a

runaway dog. There was too much going on with Abel Gideon and the *Tattlecrime* article meant to incense the Ripper. Besides, he thought with a smile, he was going to make an appointment with HR to see if the Ignacio rumors were true.

As he pulled off the road and into his driveway, he was shocked to see Hannibal's Bentley parked in the drive. Will eased the Volvo alongside it and got out. The house was dark, and the dogs weren't nosing the curtains open like they usually did when he got home. He could hear Winston barking, probably from his crate in their room at the back of the house. Hannibal had kenneled them? Why?

He hurried onto the front porch. Hannibal was visible through the window, perched in the chair where Will worked on his fishing flies. Just sitting in the dark, eyes distant, one elbow on the work table. The hand attached to it was raised, and Hannibal was pressing his thumb rhythmically into the side of his index finger, hard enough that Will could see that the two planes of flesh did not glide smoothly together. Just before Hannibal looked up, alerted by his approach, Will caught a glimpse of his facial expression. It was one he'd never seen Hannibal bear before – some kind of deep, bitter anger.

This cloud on Hannibal's features cleared immediately as he moved his head to look at Will, blinking back into his usual mild expression, though there was no warmth in it.

Will opened the front door and let himself in. Hannibal rose from the chair and buttoned his suit jacket before smoothing it into place.

"What are you doing here?" Will winced physically at the way he'd sounded, though Hannibal's look didn't change. "I mean – did I — miss an appointment?" Terror sank into him, cutting to the bone. Had he lost time again? "It's Thursday, right?" His voice was weak and pathetic in his ears as he looked at his watch.

"Yes," was all Hannibal said, staring at him with such intensity that Will was forced to look away. He kicked off his shoes on the rug and stripped off his coat, hanging it on the usual hook before switching on a nearby lamp. He could hear the wind whistling in the chimney and the occasional whine of one of the dogs. Otherwise, the house, and Hannibal, were silent.

Maybe he's not there, Will's mind whispered to him. *Maybe it's like the stag. Only this time you're seeing a person.* Will took off his glasses and set them on the fly table so he could rub his eyes for a moment. Hannibal certainly smelled real, his cologne this time a warm winter scent, heavy on the juniper. When he looked up, Hannibal was still standing in front of him.

Hannibal leaned forward a few inches and inhaled. "Beverly Katz," he said, voice as calm and smooth as a lake on a windless day.

"Y-yeah," Will confirmed, feeling a rush of heat pulse over his face. "We went out for drinks."

"Very sociable." Again, the same placidity. Despite any evidence to support it, Will's instincts waved a bright red flag.

"I-I didn't know you two had m-met..." Will forced himself not to step back as Hannibal stepped forward, shrinking the space between them again.

"Briefly in Jack's office."

Will's breath was shaky as he drew it into his lungs. What the hell was going on here? He had a sense that Hannibal was doing his best to restrain himself. He hated the comparison as soon as his mind made it, but it reminded him of a dog waiting for an attack order, every muscle bunched and quivering, eyes sharp and full of violence. "A-are you okay?" he asked, barely above a whisper.

"I heard a rumor," Hannibal said, the pleasant cadence of his voice a direct opposite of the *coiling* Will could feel emanating from him. "Apparently Dr. Frederick Chilton thinks he has the Chesapeake Ripper locked up in his ward." He paused. The silence was a ball and chain stretched between them.

"No, he doesn't," Will insisted.

The right corner of Hannibal's mouth twitched, the nearly-imperceptible shadow of a smile. "Really? He's been telling every professional acquaintance he has. Nothing official, but he seems very confident."

"Overconfident." Will ran his index knuckle over his lip a moment, feeling the tension dial back a bit. "I saw the scene. It's plagiarism. It looks like the Ripper's work but it's... just a reproduction." He breathed easier as the coiling he sensed in Hannibal seemed to dissipate. "It's like comparing the original *Starry Night* with a poster print on some dorm room wall."

Hannibal's smile was more evident this time. "Dr. Chilton always had loose lips. They might sink him this time."

"I saw the Ripper," Will said firmly, "but I didn't feel him."

Hannibal responded by snatching Will's face between his hands and kissing him with an amorous fury Will had never experienced before. He barely registered what was happening before Hannibal hooked his fingers through Will's dress shirt and tore it open, scattering buttons over the floor. It was such a departure from Hannibal's usual unhurried way; Will was shocked into stillness as Hannibal continued to undress him roughly. When Hannibal fondled him through his underwear before pulling it off in a few quick movements, Will's desire came crashing back, a tidal wave that soaked his body and singularly focused his mind.

Hannibal tossed off his suit jacket and Will came at him, yanking on the perfectly knotted tie and crushing their mouths together again, the other hand tearing open Hannibal's vest without unbuttoning it first. Hannibal let go of him only to shrug this off as well while Will tugged at the dress shirt, pressing his face into Hannibal's neck before demanding the kiss again, the penetration of tongue.

Hannibal snapped his cuffs open, more buttons clattering across the floor and threw the garment off before taking Will by the arms and shoving him down on Will's humble bed, hard enough that the pictures clattered on the walls. Will was vaguely aware of the dogs barking, but it was distant, as though he were under water.

Hannibal worked his thigh between Will's and Will ground himself against it as he grew desperately hard. He grunted a half-yelp when Hannibal wrenched his head back by the hair to expose this throat, licking the slope of it before dragging his teeth over the rise of Will's Adam's apple, tonguing that part of him named after original sin. Will clutched desperately at Hannibal's back, entombed in the delectation of being so forcefully desired.

Hannibal moved his mouth to the rise of Will's left pectoral, his hand finding its way around Will's throat, a possessive grip that made Will's pulse pound behind his eyes. When Hannibal marked him there, Will couldn't stop the sound he made. The dogs howled in response.

Hannibal climbed free of him, standing at the edge of the bed, unbuckling his belt. "Get on your knees," he ordered, words laden with sensual gluttony.

Will obeyed him instantly, climbing off of the bed and kneeling in front of Hannibal, helping him free of the last of his clothing in graceless, frenetic movements. Will opened his mouth and swallowed him, hands clasped on Hannibal's hips, Hannibal alternately stroking his hair lovingly or twisting it with barely-tempered cruelty.

"On the bed," Hannibal panted just as the first muscle contractions that would mark his climax began, edging himself back.

Will did as he was told. Hannibal pushed him on his knees and knelt behind him. A flicker of fear shivered over Will's nerves. Was he going to try *this* now, and how badly would it hurt?

Hannibal pressed himself against Will's backside, sliding his length along the place where Will's back met his pelvis, cushioned there in what felt like a perfect fit. He leaned forward and pushed Will's head down until he folded his arms at the elbow, making his posture more submissive. Will surprised himself with how the action amped up his desire even more, the sense of danger, not being able to see Hannibal. The vulnerability was intoxicating, doubly so when Hannibal began to move his hips, reaching around to stimulate him from the front. The hand Hannibal had locked around the flesh of Will's hip constricted hard enough to likely leave marks, bruises and scrapes where Hannibal's fingernails, short as they were, bored into Will's skin.

Hannibal's breath caught in a series of little muffled gasps, and Will felt the warm spread splatter over his back. The sensation made him lose control himself, his whole body contracting, one calf cramping in a spectacular bolt of pain that sank away, drowned in the glowing bodily pleasure.

Will collapsed forward, angling himself just enough to protect his very sensitive anatomy, Hannibal on top of him. They breathed in the darkness for a few moments, listening to the wind creak the house and the dogs whine softly. At last, Hannibal pressed a kiss against the side of Will's neck and moved aside, turning on his back. Will found his favorite place tucked against Hannibal's side, and Hannibal held him close, though not with the possessive ardor he'd displayed earlier.

When Will sat up briefly to pull a plaid blanket up from where it had fallen on the floor, draping it over them, Hannibal said, "Forgive me, Will. That was less than chivalrous."

"Did it seem like I didn't... *enjoy* myself?" Will wondered as Hannibal tucked the blanket around them.

"It is never my intention to be a selfish lover. I fear I was very self-serving."

"You were different, I'll give you that." Will propped himself up on his elbow to look Hannibal in the face. The window sash created a slash of shadow that partially obscured it, but Will studied him carefully. Hannibal leveled his gaze. "What's wrong?" Will asked after a long moment.

Hannibal's mouth curved on one side as he ran his fingers, so gentle now, through Will's hair, the other caressing his arm just above the elbow. "I should never again forget how perceptive you are."

"So what is it? The Chilton thing?"

Hannibal chuckled through the word, "No. That was merely conversation to fill the silence when I did not know how to communicate my need." He caressed the side of Will's face, and Will descended for a soft kiss. "It was a very long day," Hannibal said, as if that explained it.

"Long how?"

Hannibal gazed up at him, an adoring softness in his eyes. "Unfortunately, I can't comment. Doctor-patient confidentiality."

"Was it the neurotic crying guy?" Will asked as Hannibal tucked him back into their original position.

"Among others. A trying series of clients left me brimming with a frustration that I expressed in this way." He paused. "I didn't hurt you?"

"I'm fine. Better than fine, actually."

"Good." Hannibal seemed relieved, stroking the outline of Will's hand and arm through the blanket. "I needed you tonight, Will."

A sudden blaze of affection ignited in Will's chest and surged through him, tempered only by the sudden echo of Beverly's words through his head. *It's easy to catch feelings.*

"Hannibal..." he began, tongue loaded with all of his unasked questions. They dried up before connecting with his voice.

"Yes, Will?"

He sighed. "I, uh, I need to check on the dogs."

Hannibal watched Will get out of bed, pulling on his underwear clumsily, shivering a bit in the winter's drafts that always found their way in. He picked up a crumpled sweater from where he'd dumped it on the piano bench a few days ago and hurried into it, stealing a glance around the room. He wished he'd known Hannibal was coming – he could have cleaned up a little. At least vacuumed the dog hair.

The dogs yelped in relief when he let himself into the back room, but quieted instantly when he gave them the signal. He let them out the back door for a quick break, then ushered them inside. He hoped Hannibal wouldn't mind if they all slept in the same room. The dogs were so used to their beds by the hearth that they'd probably whine all night if forced to be elsewhere.

"Be polite," Will warned them before he opened the door back to the front room. The dogs trotted in, tails wagging furiously, but went respectfully to their beds. Hannibal had turned on the space heater that sat in the dead fireplace and it radiated a warm glow. He was, however, no longer tucked in Will's bed, instead shrugging on his ruined shirt, closing the one remaining button and tucking it into his trousers as best he could.

"You're leaving?" Will couldn't keep the disappointment at bay, and it dripped from those two simple words.

"Sadly, I must." Hannibal retrieved his vest and slipped it on. Finding no remaining buttons, he let it hang open as he slid his arms into his jacket. "I have early morning appointments." He tied his shoes with a few brisk movements, and stood to pick up Will's shirt from where he'd folded it on the bed. "I'll have this repaired or replaced."

"Don't worry about it," Will insisted.

"You rotate between the same seven shirts when dressing for work," Hannibal said, draping the folded plaid over his arm. "I'd hate to see your options further limited." He smiled, stepping up to give Will a light kiss and a little squeeze on the arm. "Goodnight, Will."

" 'Night," Will said curtly as the door shut and Hannibal disappeared into the darkness.

And... CUT.

Now, start the episode again. The real Chesapeake Ripper calls Jack with a recording of Miriam Lass's voice to prove that Abel Gideon is not the Ripper, and torture Jack with guilt!

Stay tuned!

Season 1 Episode 7: Sorbet

Chapter Summary

Will is captivated by Hannibal's medical skills as he steps in to save the kidney thief's latest victim. On the drive home, Will can't keep his hands to himself. They pull over into a cemetery to fool around in the car like a couple of high school sweethearts. Then the Neighborhood Watch shows up...

Chapter Notes

Companion Song: "If I Had a Heart" – Fever Ray

"This will never end 'cause I want more / More, give me more / Give me more / If I had a heart I could love you..."

This "cut unscene" occurs after Will, Jack, Beverly, and Hannibal catch the kidney thief. Will and Hannibal share a significant look as Hannibal stabilizes Devon Sylvestri's latest victim in the back of his "borrowed" ambulance.

Good God.

What was it about the simple act of rolling up his sleeves?

Maybe it wasn't that. Maybe it was the sight of Hannibal up to his wrist in someone's abdomen, knowing that he held the poor bastard's life in his hands.

Maybe it was all that, and the smell of blood, hot and fresh, that wafted past Jack, past the SWAT team, past Beverly, as if it was aimed at Will alone. The way Hannibal had looked at him, that seemingly simple glance up from his life-saving work, so laden with some kind of significance.

Whatever it was, Will felt speechless, senseless, completely consumed by the tableau in front of him. So powerful was the effect that he barely noticed the stag standing on top of the ambulance, dipping his head down in some kind of reverence.

"Hey." A hand on his arm, someone's words in his ear. Will slowly sank back from his reverie. "You okay?"

It was Beverly, her gun holstered, looking at him with her mouth folded in concern. Will didn't dare look back at Hannibal, but instead turned to watch as Sylvestri was cuffed and led over to a cruiser without resistance or ceremony. Jack marched past Will and Bev in frosty silence, getting into the front seat of the vehicle where the suspect was detained in the back seat.

Beverly regarded the scene in the ambulance. A few of the SWAT officers had removed their head and face gear and were watching Hannibal with interest as he worked to stabilize the patient. "EMS is on the way," one of them said after speaking into his radio.

"Thank you, officer," Hannibal said, eyes on his work. "Are any of you medically trained? I could use an extra hand."

One of the guys nodded and handed his gun to his buddy, climbing in through the front of the ambulance, stripping off his body armor to assist.

"Will."

He turned back to Beverly, who was studying him carefully with her dark, canny eyes. She shifted her gaze to Hannibal, then back to him. "Uh huh," she murmured, then shook her head. "You all right?"

"Yeah," he answered, rubbing his eyes with one hand for a moment. When he dropped his hand, the world had returned to some semblance of normalcy. The stag was gone, anyway, and time seemed to be moving at its normal pace again.

"So... did we catch the Chesapeake Ripper, or what?" Beverly's tone was doubtful as she crossed her arms and leaned her weight on one foot.

Will scoffed a bitter laugh. "Sylvestri's just an organ thief. Probably trying to save up to pay for med school."

"Well, he's gonna fail the test about the Hippocratic Oath," Beverly said, running a hand through her hair. "Glad we got him off the street, but — shit, Jack's gotta be devastated. This loser has no fucking clue who Miriam Lass is, much less where she's buried."

"The investigation might dig up a connection." His voice was gravelly. He cleared his throat, trying to breathe evenly, deliberately not watching Hannibal tend the patient a few yards away.

"Yeah, right," Beverly said. "You know as well as I do that's not happening." She sighed, kicking at a few chunks of loose asphalt, skittering them a couple inches across the crumbly parking lot. "The Ripper's still out there."

"And he's targeting Jack," Will mused, watching as the black SUV containing Jack and Sylvestri pulled away from the scene, splashing them with red and blue lights.

"Bastard," Beverly muttered, shaking her head.

Just then, an ambulance arrived that was not, presumably, also a mobile organ harvesting operating room. The EMTs jumped out, pausing briefly in surprise, perhaps because their patient was already on a stretcher and stabilized. Hannibal stepped out of the back bay and moved to the side, allowing EMS to get the victim out and loaded into their own vehicle. Will watched him carefully strip off his gloves and tuck them safely in the hazardous materials waste bin before rolling his sleeves back down. One of the SWAT guys handed him back his suit jacket and he slid it on before approaching Will and Beverly.

"Nice work, Doc," Beverly complimented, though Will was suspicious of her raised eyebrow. She glanced from Hannibal back to Will, as if examining how they looked at one another.

"Think he'll... pull through?" Will asked, averting his eyes immediately as Hannibal looked at him to answer.

"I'm hopeful, but I can't say for certain. You'll let me know if you hear any news?"

"Sure," Bev said. "You drove, right? I can take Will back to Quantico to get his car."

"I'm afraid in all the excitement I left my briefcase in Will's lecture hall," Hannibal told them both. "There are private patient files inside."

"Yo Katz, let's go!" Another agent called from the open window of the other cruiser. "You coming?" This was, perhaps, directed at Will.

"It's late. I wouldn't mind someone to keep me awake on the drive," Hannibal said, looking at the two of them.

Beverly gave Will a knowing, sidelong glance. "You two go ahead. I'll ride back with the other guys. Who knows, maybe I can talk them into stopping at Hacienda Las Glorias."

"Good luck with that." Will offered her a small smile. Bev returned it, then got into the cruiser just as the crime scene unit pulled in, led by Jimmy and Zeller.

"Shall we?" Hannibal inclined his head toward where he'd hurriedly parked the Bentley. Will nodded and they moved for the vehicle, shoulder to shoulder. Hannibal let his hand brush Will's, sliding his knuckles along the back of Will's hand. Will extended his thumb on instinct and it traced along the edge of Hannibal's wrist for part of a second, a blip in time that somehow communicated so much.

Hannibal drove them out of the shabby neighborhood the organ thief had chosen for his gristly errand, and got back on the I-95 heading southwest. Will tried to keep his gaze straight ahead. The lines that divided the highway blurred and the red tail lights of passing vehicles were sinister eyes under the urban halo of street lights and illuminated billboards. They drove in silence, reclaiming the thick atmosphere they'd shared in the lecture hall before Jack and Beverly had barged in, interrupting their conversation about the Chesapeake Ripper. It was almost as if the Ripper had been there with them, listening, a heavy third presence, a strangely sensual voyeur, looming and monstrous.

Will felt that same heavy, unexplainable presence now, in the quiet berth of the car, Hannibal at his side with one hand on the wheel, the other resting on his thigh. Will pictured that same hand wrist-deep in the victim they'd found in the back of the ambulance. Was Hannibal's skin still warm from the man's viscera, his living blood?

Unable to stop himself, Will glanced down at the hand in question where it was stretched out over the fine texture of his trousers.

A strip of white fabric emerged from the jacket's cuff, just the hint of Hannibal's dress shirt. The virginal white cloth was stained with a single errant drop of blood. As Will examined it, it was as if he could see every fiber that had absorbed the redness, feathering it out as it saturated the small area, no larger than the head of a thumbtack.

Before he knew what he was doing, Will reached out and brushed the pad of his forefinger over the stain. Hannibal glanced his way, then back at the interstate. Will slid his hand down over the shirt

cuff, and then let it rest on top of Hannibal's, gently linking their fingers together. Each of them stared ahead at the thinning traffic, still wonderfully mired in the pregnant silence.

After a few miles, Will's hand, almost of its own volition, wandered away from Hannibal's, and slipped along the inner side of Hannibal's thigh. His feather-light caress slowly built into a brazen grope. Hannibal's body responded immediately to this manipulation, though from the waist up no one would be the wiser. Will did, however, quirk his mouth in a smug half-smile when Hannibal changed lanes but for once forgot to use the turn signal.

Will continued his tease, sometimes watching Hannibal's profile as he kept his eyes fixed on the road, sometimes looking through the windshield as well. After a mile or so, he noticed the first glimmer of perspiration form at Hannibal's temple. He felt himself hardening and shifted in his seat.

Traffic slowed, and Hannibal braked roughly, having been caught, it seemed, by surprise. "Will," he pleaded, just above the sound of the highway as the traffic picked up again.

"Pull over." With Hannibal in his hand like this, it was not a request, though the command was half-whispered.

Hannibal obliged, nosing the Bentley into the right lane and off at the nearest exit. They drove through a small commercial area before discovering a series of suburban cul-de-sacs. Across from a gated neighborhood was a cemetery – modern, pastoral, with flat markers, paved lanes winding through adorned by faux street signs displaying names like *Resurrection Road* and *Paradise Corner.* Near the small brick chapel stood three white crosses that towered up into the night like trees stripped of their leaves by weather or fire. Hannibal parked on the lane directly beneath them, cutting the Bentley's lights but keeping the engine running.

It had been over twenty years since Will had fooled around in a car, but he found himself moving with a surety that seemed entirely outside himself. He kicked off his shoes and stripped off his jacket in a few rough movements, then climbed past the center console into Hannibal's lap. Will wedged one thigh between Hannibal's and the door and let his other knee drive into the center panel – completely uncomfortable, but he couldn't have cared less.

Hannibal clutched him with one arm and pushed against the edge of the steering wheel with the other, leveraging them together even more tightly. As it was, Will was breathless as he rushed in for the kiss, taking Hannibal by the side of his face and digging his fingers into the fine fabric of Hannibal's jacket lapel, giving it a sharp twist. Will skipped the usual pleasantries, as much as he'd come to enjoy them, and shoved his tongue in impatiently.

Hannibal granted him entrance for a few moments, only to pull him back by the hair, drawing their faces apart. "You're in quite a state, Will."

"I liked watching you work," Will told him, laden with honesty.

The fingers in his hair relaxed and Hannibal allowed the kiss again, responding, Will thought, with added fervor after hearing what Will had said. As Will maneuvered just enough to get a few fingers in the right position to undo Hannibal's belt buckle, his ass honked the car horn.

They both laughed as Will fumbled the belt buckle open and unzipped Hannibal's trousers, easing him free. "Careful, Will. You'll wake the dead."

"It's their fault if they thought that was Gabriel's trumpet," Will said, and Hannibal smiled into his kiss, then exhaled sharply as Will touched him in earnest, positioning his hand where he could stroke at an upward angle. Hannibal pushed himself through Will's hand as well, using the steering wheel and the seat for leverage.

"I enjoy— watching you work, as well." Hannibal's tone was conversational, but interrupted by his strained breaths, punctuated by sighs of his desire. "Your perceptions excite me."

"You look forward to seeing me, don't you?" Will said this into Hannibal's neck as Hannibal tossed his head back, tensing to finish. "That's why you drove an hour and a half to find me when I didn't show up tonight. Could've picked up the phone. But you didn't."

Will arrested his motion and let go just in time. Hannibal growled in frustration, but it was soft, amorous. "Say it," Will instructed, drawing one finger along the bottom of Hannibal's length.

"Will–"

"Say it," Will insisted, even as Hannibal's fingers twisted in his hair, coiling to pull again.

"Yes," Hannibal admitted, and exhaled in deep relief as Will resumed his work. Within moments, he peaked, burying his face against Will's shoulder, fingers twisting in his clothes and hair. Will tucked him back in as gently as he could as Hannibal's breathing evened out, then kissed him, beautiful and brutal.

"If you care to retire to the backseat–" Hannibal began, but was interrupted by a sharp rap on the driver's side window. Will shied away, raising a hand against the stark light of a flashlight forcing its way through the glass. Hannibal shifted him off of his lap and Will slid clumsily back into the passenger's seat.

Hannibal rolled down the window and the light was pointed, mercifully, in another direction. When Will's eyes adjusted, he could see a portly man with a grizzled gray beard and a camo baseball cap standing next to the Bentley. He automatically scanned the individual to look for any signs of authority or the hint of a uniform, but came up short. The guy was wearing a striped polo and cargo khakis, but his face was red and determined.

"Good evening," Hannibal said placidly.

"Whadda ya doin' out here?" the man demanded, puffing up his chest, words brusque.

"I think you know." Hannibal glanced over at Will, and offered the man a sort of "aw shucks" smile that Will could tell he was wearing like a mask.

"Well, you can't park here," the man insisted. "And you can't do – that – here."

"Who are you, exactly?" Will spat, leaning over to get a better look at the guy.

"Neighborhood watch," the man informed them, his manner clipped and curt.

Will reached into his pocket and dug out his shield. "I think the FBI outranks neighborhood watch." He flashed it across Hannibal, holding it close to the rolled down window.

"W-what?" the man stuttered, his face so flushed that Will could tell, even in the dim lighting, how furious he was. "I mean, what's the FBI doing out here – doing, uh– listen, you two need to move

along, okay?"

"I'm on a special assignment," Will said, low, dangerous, cold anger unfurling her wings through every corner of his body. "Investigating me *kicking your ass*."

"Wh- y-you wanna go, buddy?"

Will put his hand on the door latch, but Hannibal closed his fingers around Will's other arm to stop him. "Please excuse us. We'll be on our way. Do you have a business card, perchance?"

"In case you wanna come to my job and unleash your boyfriend on me?" the man snarked, crossing his arms over his broad chest.

"In case we wish to follow up for more information. We're house hunting in this area." Hannibal's lie was smooth with velvet edges. "It's nice to know how safe this neighborhood is with you patrolling it."

"Oh." The man removed his hat to scratch his head for a moment. "Well, actually, my wife's a realtor. Here." He pulled out a velcro wallet and handed Hannibal a business card.

"Nancy Pines. And you are?"

"Randy Pines." Somehow, the asshole was shaking Hannibal's hand through the open car window. "My wife's got some real nice houses for sale just a couple blocks from here. This *is* a family neighborhood, though. We don't need any of these kinda... shenanigans."

"So sorry about that," Will said, each word barbed with sarcasm. "I get *really... turned on* by real estate."

"Good night, Mr. Pines." Hannibal rolled up the window and pulled away, leaving the neighborhood watchman staring after them, hands on his hips.

Will sighed, irritation spiking his headache. "Fuck," he muttered, rubbing his eyes. When he opened them and looked at Hannibal, he was smiling. Will couldn't help but join him. "House hunting..." He shook his head, adjusting himself uncomfortably.

"Are you interested in real estate?" Hannibal asked him as they got back on the interstate.

Will scoffed a laugh. "No, not especially. Where are we going?" Hannibal had pulled off of the I-95 again, an airport exit.

"To see to your situation," Hannibal told him, eyeing Will's lap where he was clearly still aroused. They pulled into the parking lot of an airport Westin. Hannibal went in and secured a room, then returned to park the Bentley and collect Will. Alone in the elevator, they came together for six floors worth of feverish kissing, then moved quickly down the hall for the correct room.

A few steps, and they were together at the foot of the closest bed. Hannibal drew his palms down from Will's shoulders, along his lapels for a moment before pushing Will's jacket off, letting it fall on the floor.

"This is new." Hannibal fingered the collar of the shirt Will was wearing.

"Yeah. Wore out the elbow in one of the others."

"I'll be careful removing it this time," Hannibal promised, sliding his hands around Will's waist and guiding him a few steps until he backed into the end of the bed. Will slid back onto the smooth, cool white duvet and Hannibal kicked off his shoes before climbing on after him, boxing him in with his body.

Hannibal ran a hand through Will's hair slowly, and traced his fingers down his cheekbone. His other hand, with ambidextrous certainty, thumbed open the buttons of Will's shirt.

Will caught the opposite hand that toyed with his ear and kissed the palm. Hannibal ran his thumb over Will's lower lip, then briefly penetrated his mouth with it.

"God, you are so fucking hot," Will murmured, voice strained and growling with desire. He locked his hands behind Hannibal's back and tried to pull him closer, but Hannibal resisted with a mischievous glint in his dark eyes. "Come here, damn it."

Hannibal planted a knee on either side of Will's hips and put a hand palm down on the bed behind his head. "Patience is a virtue," he said through a half-smile that revealed the edge of his teeth. Will put an arm behind his own head and leaned back as Hannibal hovered over him, slowly unbuckling him. "Fools rush in."

Will ran his hand over Hannibal's hair, then thumbed his bottom lip, his breath quick, searing his throat. "Too late," he breathed.

"Tell me, Will..." Hannibal trailed off, busy now pulling Will's shirt open and undressing him the rest of the way. He teased off his tie and slipped it around Will's neck instead, where it rested, cool and silky, against his flushed skin.

Will barely had the breath to answer. "What is it?"

Hannibal guided Will's finger into his own mouth briefly, then removed it to say, "I'm afraid to ask. Your answer will determine whether or not we should continue as we are."

"W-what?" Will clawed his grip into Hannibal's shirt and yanked on it. A seam ripped somewhere, but Hannibal was immobile, tantalizing inches still stretched between them. "Don't fucking stop."

"Tell me the truth, now," Hannibal whispered, twisting the silk necktie in his hand so it closed tightly around Will's throat. Tight. Tighter. Hannibal bent over him, put his lips to his ear, hair falling against Will's burning cheek. "Do you like this?"

"Yes," Will rasped through his rapidly-diminishing windpipe. Hannibal smiled against his ear and released the ligature, finally pressing himself against Will's prone body. He slid to the side just enough to trap one of Will's arms against his hip, forcing a leg between his knees.

"Do you enjoy it when I'm forceful with you?" Hannibal breathed against his mouth, their lips a half-inch apart, as he guided Will's other arm out from behind his neck and pressed it against the bed, then replaced it with his own, curling his bicep beneath Will's head and arching his hand back to take a fistful of his hair. He jerked Will's head back in a sudden motion that rippled pain and pleasure across Will's scalp, tingling down his body to each nerve ending.

Will gasped, his eyes now full of nothing but the beige ceiling of the hotel room. He gave an exploratory attempt at freeing himself, but discovered within moments that wasn't going to happen.

He tried again, harder, breathing short and fast as he struggled, but there was no chance. Hannibal had him pinned with a shocking amount of expertise, and he was completely prone. No leverage.

Hannibal slipped his fingers through Will's hair, releasing it so he could bend his chin down again and look him in the eyes, blue to amber. Hannibal cocked his head to the side, bottom lip protruding ever so slightly "Do you want me to let you go?"

"Fuck no," Will panted and Hannibal's lip curved back upward. "Just – kiss me — touch me — I'm losing my fucking mind—"

"Interesting choice of words." Hannibal closed the distance. Will tried to rise, to bring their lips together, but Hannibal's steely fingers yanked his head back down by the hair again at the last second. "Ask again."

"Kiss me," he whispered.

"Beg," Hannibal ordered, his voice a soft breeze sliding over Will's lips.

"I can't take it, please—"

Hannibal relented at last and buried his mouth on Will's, sliding his tongue in as far as it would go before pulling back, softer, more sweetly now, gentle pressure, and then the lightest touches. With aching slowness, inch by inch, kiss by kiss, he drifted his lips to the corner of Will's mouth, then down his jaw, following the strong line back to his ear, then descending, bit by bit, mere centimeters of flesh at a time, along his throat, to just the right spot.

Will's heart thundered against his ribs and his breathing was labored in anticipation. Hannibal put his lips firmly over the sweet spot he seemed to favor and Will quivered beneath him, waiting desperately for something he couldn't name. The teeth grazed his neck once, twice, again, but didn't even bruise the skin.

"God, please, Hannibal —"He pushed his hips up, desperately rutting himself against Hannibal's fully clothed outline.

"God isn't here." He could feel the words uttered against the moistened, tender flesh of his neck. At long last, Hannibal touched him, then slid slowly back until his mouth was just where it belonged. Will tensed, then felt his body practically liquify as Hannibal deployed an arsenal of skills, including a very intrepid tongue and an exploratory massaging fingers. Will's tension had begun right after they'd gotten in the car, and was now at last released in a climax that was blinding in its power and exhausting in its wake.

When he opened his eyes, all he could see was darkness. He blinked, but it didn't clear. Slowly, textures came into view. Fur. Feathers. The heaving flank of an animal as it breathed. Will squeezed his eyes shut again, willing the stag to go away. The hide remained over his vision even with his eyes closed.

After what felt like several long moments, he woke up to the sensation of fingers sliding through his hair, brushing it back with a soothing rhythm. He realized where he was— naked on a hotel bed, curled up on his side with his head resting in Hannibal's lap. He could feel the fine fabric of Hannibal's trousers against his cheek, but he could see the suit jacket draped on the back of the hotel's desk chair.

Nondescript modern hotel furnishings. White bed. Hannibal's legs stretched out, trousers, socks. The sound of the HVAC and the murmur of his own heart and breathing. The scent of Hannibal after sex, which was becoming more and more beautifully familiar. Hand in his hair. Taste of lips on his own. All of Will's senses told him he was awake. Still, he didn't trust it, but the dreamlike quality of the moment made him bold.

"What is this?"

Hannibal's hand paused a moment before resuming his rhythm of strokes, precise as a metronome. He didn't answer.

"Back at Quantico," Will began, turning on his back to look up at Hannibal, whose unreadable face was shadowy and distant. "Tonight when we were looking at the Ripper crime scene photos. I-I asked you to choose your words carefully. You-you said words have... *personality*. That they have... points of view, and-and... *agendas*." He paused. Hannibal looked away, mouth a subtle, thin line. Will went on, speaking quickly, before he lost his nerve. "So what is this? What is... us?"

Hannibal didn't answer right away, but after a time, he looked down at Will with a soft, deeply tender expression Will had never seen on his face before. "There is no word for what we have," he said, each syllable deliberate and charged with meaning. "It has no name." The foreign expression melted away, shifted off of his features within mere fractions of a second. "For now, 'friends' must suffice."

Will nodded, but it stung nevertheless. Hannibal must have sensed this, because he wasted no time gathering Will in his arms and kissing him, slow, and deep. "For now," he said, when they'd finally broken apart, "we will have to be patient, and let our actions speak."

***

Will woke the next morning in Wolf Trap still smelling like Hannibal. He was reluctant to shower it off, but felt like there was no other choice. The day at Quantico was busy, his time between classes spent in the lab or Jack's office, going over the details from last night's arrest.

Jack found Will, Beverly, Jimmy, and Zeller gathered in the lab, debating if an ambulance could have moved unseen to every Ripper site. He looked tired, Will thought, more so than usual, his eyes dull, and the usual fire that marked him was quenched. Everyone quieted as he entered. "Sylvestri isn't the Ripper." Jack handed Will a file, but Beverly plucked it from his grasp and flipped it open. "So far, there's no connection between him and any of the victims. We still have more information to run down, but–" He shook his head. "The guy was living in California during the last sounder, and was on call as an EMT. No way he could have come all the way to the East Coast to kill and get back in time for his next shift." Unbelievably, Will thought he saw tears in Jack's eyes, which he blinked away hurriedly. "Good news," he muttered. "The victim we found in the back of the ambulance will make a full recovery. So that's something, I guess."

Silence descended, suffocating, like a cloud of acrid smoke.

At last, Jimmy said, "Jack... I know you wanted–"

Jack turned, without meeting anyone's eye, and headed for the door.

"You're going to catch him, Jack," Will called after him. But Jack was already in the hallway and soon out of sight.

Nobody said anything for a long moment. Beverly sighed and closed the folder, tucking it under her arm.

"If you wanna say 'I told you so,' can you get it over with?" Zeller directed this at Will, settling back onto his stool and firing up the microscope.

"Shut up, Z." Beverly glanced at Will and gave him a small, tight-lipped smile and a squeeze on the arm. Everyone returned to their work in silence. Will stood awkwardly for a time before withdrawing to the lecture hall for his coat and satchel, and headed out to his car.

Will turned the Volvo on and blasted the defrost to clear the diamond-crust of ice crystals from the windshield. As he waited, he pulled out his phone and flipped through the contacts, pausing over Hannibal's number.

Could've picked up the phone. But you didn't.

Will drove to a nearby organic foods store he'd gone to a few times to get gulf shrimp when he was craving it. He knew they had what appeared to be a decent wine section. He wandered it, suddenly swept up in anxiety. He had no fucking clue what most of these bottles were or if they were any good. An employee noticed, thankfully, and helped him make a selection. "Just because it's more expensive, to a certain point, doesn't mean it's better. Here, this one's my favorite." She handed him a cabernet sauvignon.

When Will arrived at Hannibal's house, he was ushered inside by a man dressed like a chef in a white uniform, hair covered by a black cap. The house was alive with activity; a cleaning lady dusted the mantle while another polished the furniture, and others were constructing an intricate scene on the dinner table, arranging the plates and silverware as well as the centerpieces and other decorative elements.

"Will," Hannibal greeted pleasantly when he entered the kitchen. "This is a nice surprise."

Will eyed the extra prep tables and the chefs that worked busily behind them before looking at Hannibal again, taking him in properly. There were those damn forearms again, Will noticed, trying to ignore Hannibal's rolled-up sleeves.

"This is, ah..." He struggled for a moment. "You, ah – opening a restaurant?"

Hannibal smiled as he poured something that looked suspiciously like blood into a food processor. "I'm having a few friends for dinner. Mostly a group I met through the Baltimore Arts Council."

Will felt a hollow cave grow in his chest, bleeding away any pleasant anticipation at seeing Hannibal again this evening. It was stupid, dropping by unannounced, assuming Hannibal would be free for the night. Of course he had plans, with people he clearly wanted to impress. Arts council people who were probably into opera and abstract art. And who could smell white trash like Will a mile away.

"Excuse me." A cleaning lady brushed past him, headed somewhere with a bucket of supplies.

Will drew in on himself, feeling awkward, and very in the way. "I should get going. I just, ah – I was in the neighborhood." He hesitantly showed Hannibal the bottle of wine.

"You must stay for dinner," Hannibal insisted, cutting up a juicy tomato.

For now, 'friends' must suffice.

If he wanted me here, Will thought, *I would have gotten an invitation.*

"I can't," Will lied. "I have to... get b-back. Jack needs me at Quantico."

"A pity." Hannibal put the lid on the food processor and gave it a long whirl. When the machine's noise died away, he said, "I have a butcher who carries sow's blood. Centrifugate – separate the matter from the water – creates a transparent liquid." He poured the clear plasma into a bowl, leaving the red matter behind. "Serve with tomatoes in suspension and everybody will love the sweet taste." He adjusted the contents of a pot with a slotted spoon, then glanced up at Will. "Are you sure you can't stay?"

"Uh, I don't think I'd be good company." Will shrank back as another prep chef whisked by holding a plate of something he couldn't identify, but smelled delectable. He palmed the wine nervously. Part of him wanted to accept the invitation, as much as it was clear to him it had been made after the fact.

"I disagree," Hannibal replied, eyes on his work as he mixed more ingredients together. "But, before you go, what became of Mr. Sylvestri's donor?"

"You saved his life," Will told him, the reality of the words dawning on him as he said them.

Hannibal considered. "Been a long time since I used a scalpel on anything but a pencil."

Will found himself blocking out the bustle around the kitchen, slipping back into the past of a man, he had to admit, he hardly knew. Not in Biblical terms, of course. "Why'd you stop being a surgeon?"

"I killed someone. Or, more accurately, I couldn't save someone. But it felt like killing them."

As frustrated as Will wanted to be with Hannibal, with the dinner party and the hired help, with the word *friend*, Hannibal's confession pierced something in him. "You were an emergency room surgeon. It has to happen from time to time."

Hannibal carefully poured something from one stainless steel bowl to another. "It happened one time too many. I transferred my passion for anatomy into the culinary arts." He looked at Will, his face open, earnest. "I fix minds instead of bodies, and no one's died as a result of my therapy."

Will chuckled, and thought about saying, *Well, that's good news for me*. But the last thing he wanted to think about right now was the tenuous connection they had in terms of therapist and patient, or two friends having conversations. Yet another part of their relationship there was no word to accurately describe. No, best to bolt now. This whole night smelled like disaster, from the concept of "just friends" to Hannibal's fancy Arts Council guests.

I don't belong in his life. There was no indignation, only resignation.

"I have to go. I have a date with the... Chesapeake Ripper." Will stepped forward and put the wine down on the prep table in front of Hannibal, not sure what else to do with it.

"Or is that Rippers?"

"Devon Sylvestri was harvesting organs, but not with the Ripper – there's no connection between them."

Hannibal's eyes were on his work. "Jack must be devastated."

"I imagine he is," Will said as Hannibal glanced up, probably to read his expression.

Will offered a strained smile, and nodded a goodbye. "Enjoy the wine."

"Thank you."

And... CUT.

Now, start the episode again. Hannibal's dinner party is a roaring success, and nothing on the table is vegetarian!

Stay tuned!

Season 1 Episode 8: Fromage

Chapter Summary

Tobias Budge nearly killed Will, then tried to kill Hannibal. Will blames himself for not shooting Budge at the string shop and preventing him from hurting Hannibal later on. Both of them are very glad the other is alive, and they're ready to show it. It's Will's first time doing... that...

Chapter Notes

Companion Song: "That Sea, The Gambler" – Gregory Alan Isakov

"How I'd love to steer you straight into those waters / While those daunting clouds above began to pour / And when we're found, we'll kiss that ground / And roll around on that lovers floor... / The ocean is holding all the kings / And tossed aside the weary / The ocean holding everything / And tossed aside the weary."

This "cut unscene" occurs after Tobias tries to kill Will, then comes to Hannibal's office to kill Franklyn and confront Hannibal. He mentions that he killed officers that came after him, and Hannibal assumes Will is dead. They fight and Hannibal kills Tobias. When the FBI arrives on scene, Hannibal is relieved to see that Will is alive. This scene begins a couple of hours after the episode ends.

At last, the crime scene technicians finished with the evidence collection; they'd taken their pictures, lifted their prints, and gathered their samples. Someone from victims services escorted Hannibal into the restroom to get pictures of his injuries. When they returned to the office, Hannibal was fully dressed again, down to the neatly folded pocket square, cinched and buttoned up as though his suit protected him.

Will lingered at the scene. He'd spent most of the time talking to Jack, then helped the other agents interview a couple of potential witnesses that might have seen Tobias Budge enter Hannibal's office. They'd found Budge's car down the block and called in to have it towed for further evidence collection.

Now, it was getting late, or it felt that way — the winter darkness often disoriented Will, making it seem like more time had passed. "We'll be back tomorrow to finish up a few things," one of the techs told Will as she packed up her equipment. "We'll seal it off, so tell him not to come back in, okay?"

"Right." Will approached Hannibal, who had been watching the evidence collection with mild interest from his desk chair. "They're going to seal off the room."

"For how long?" Hannibal asked.

"I'm not sure, but probably no more than a day or two. Seems, ah, pretty cut and dried." Will rubbed his thumbnail against his lower lip, not meeting Hannibal's gaze.

"And then?"

"It'll be cleared, and you can use it again." Will put his hands in his pockets, unsure what else to do with them. "I, uh, I can get the number of a crime scene clean up crew, if you want. Jimmy knows a guy who–who's good."

"Thank you." Hannibal stood, picking up his appointment book to take with him. Will could tell by his gait as he walked towards the door that led into the waiting room that he was in pain; though the limp wasn't as pronounced as he'd thought it would be, considering Hannibal had been stabbed with a letter opener. Jack held the door open and he followed Will and Hannibal into the darkened foyer.

Jack rubbed his eyes a moment, then gave Hannibal a tired smile. "Dr. Lecter, I believe I speak on behalf of everyone at the BSU when I say we're glad you're all right. I'll call and check in tomorrow morning."

"Thank you, Jack. Goodnight."

Jack nodded, put on his hat, and turned toward the door. Will stood, frozen in place, physically unable to follow. It was as if he were tethered to Hannibal by some invisible chain. Jack opened the door, then turned back. "Will? You coming?"

"I-in a minute," Will stuttered.

"I'd like a moment of Will's time, if he's amenable," Hannibal said.

Will nodded. Jack asked, "Do you need a ride back to the precinct for your car?"

"No," Will said quickly. "Thanks."

Jack paused, then went out the door. Before he closed it, he stuck his head back in. "Take the morning off tomorrow. My office after lunch."

Will nodded again, putting a hand on his hip in a gesture he hoped looked casual. Jack closed the door behind himself.

"Would you drive me home, Will?"

"Of course." They shared a lingering, wordless glance that was swollen with meaning before going out to where Hannibal had parked the Bentley. Will expected to be nervous getting behind the wheel of a car that cost more than his house, but in the wake of mortal terror, it was hard to get worked up about anything else.

When they arrived, Hannibal led the way to the front door, limp more obvious now, and let them inside the foyer. Once they'd crossed the threshold into the shadowy haven, Hannibal turned the deadbolt. Will went to him immediately. They regarded one another a moment in the dim space, lit only by ambient light from the street outside that filtered through the windows. Hannibal reached out and cupped the side of Will's face. "I thought you were dead," he repeated.

Will stretched his arms around Hannibal and pulled him close, tight enough that Hannibal made a small noise of discomfort. Will immediately eased up, but neither of them was interested in letting go. He closed his fingers around the back of Hannibal's neck, then slid them through his hair. "This is all my fault," he said thickly, the numbness he'd cultivated all afternoon crumbling inside him like sand against the tide.

"No," Hannibal protested as Will pressed his face into his shoulder.

"I should have blown his fucking head off." Will was crying now; he knew it was weak and ugly, but he couldn't stop. "He got... the *drop* on me, Hannibal – I should h-have been more careful, I should have checked the corners first– and he came here and he tried to kill you..."

"Will." Hannibal said his name like a prayer. "You did what you needed to do. You survived."

"He shouldn't have gotten away." Will pulled back and dragged his sleeve over his eyes, a hot, miserable blush rising to his face as he released Hannibal from his grasp.

"And I should have mentioned Franklyn's suspicions to you sooner," Hannibal soothed. He reached out and brushed Will's wet cheek with his thumb, then stepped forward again, furrowing his brow. He lifted Will's chin and angled his face to one side, likely noting the ligature marks on the side of Will's neck where Budge's makeshift garrote had dug into his skin. There were matching ones on the back of his hand where he'd blocked the catgut strings from getting to his gullet. "He hurt you," Hannibal said softly.

"Not as badly as he hurt you." Will took a shaky breath as Hannibal lowered his hand. "Let me — can I — help you get settled?"

"Thank you, Will." Hannibal's words were smooth, but something in his expression was raw and uncultivated. Will walked him to the staircase, then looped an arm around Hannibal's midsection, giving him extra support as they ascended. In the bedroom, Hannibal stepped over to his closet. Will took off his jacket and folded it over the back of one of the chairs, then watched as Hannibal slid off his tie and examined it. Though Will couldn't see anything wrong with it, Hannibal set it on the vanity instead of replacing it in the closet.

"I don't think I'll wear this again." Again, the words and tone were placid enough, but Will honed in on the fragility of Hannibal's voice.

"Here." Will went to him and helped him out of the jacket, setting it next to the tie, discarded. Hannibal toed off his shoes as Will unbuttoned his vest, adding it to the rumpled pile of fabric that smelled like Hannibal, yes, but also like someone else, a sharp, unfamiliar tang. Next came the shirt, and Hannibal dropped his hands to his sides to let Will take it off of him.

Will took an uncomfortable breath, trying to dampen the amorous reflex of his body. He put the shirt with the rest, folding it in a messy but businesslike manner. When he turned back, Hannibal was unbuckling his own belt. Will turned away and went to the bathroom, wetting a cloth and returning with it as Hannibal stepped out of his trousers. "That son of a bitch," Will whispered hoarsely, taking in the damage. Hannibal had angry bruising all over his chest, especially on one shoulder where Budge had hit him with an end table. His right forearm was a mess of livid ligature marks carved into his flesh where he'd been attacked and constricted with some kind of catgut string weapon. The puncture wound in his leg Hannibal had sewn up himself, and bandaged with supplies provided by emergency services. There was dried blood on his face from his split eyebrow and nose, and splashed on his neck and hands.

"You should go to the hospital," Will insisted, picking up his coat. "Get dressed. I'll go get my car and take you in."

"I've patched myself up," Hannibal replied, taking a moment to check his stab wound before replacing the gauze. "And the EMTs gave me an all-clear."

"I-it doesn't hurt to be sure."

"I'm all right. And so are you." Hannibal took the wet cloth from him. "I'll see to this. You could bring me a drink, if you don't mind. There's brandy on the sideboard downstairs."

Will put his jacket down. "Y-you're sure?"

"Yes. But thank you for the concern."

Will nodded and went to fetch the brandy, bringing the bottle and a glass, and a healthy pour of whiskey for himself. When he returned, Hannibal was in his black bathrobe with the white piping, his face and hands clean, tucked in one of the two chairs that sat before the fireplace.

Will set down the drinks on the table between the chairs and set to work lighting a fire, anything he could do to feel useful. In the quiet, he became aware of the ringing that still clung to the inside of his ear, a remnant of his struggle with Budge. Against his will, his mind wandered, replaying everything that had happened.

And suddenly, he was back in the concert hall, drawing the rosined bow across the dead trombonists's vocal cords. *Had to open you up to get a decent sound out of you.* The sick, mewling un-sound poured forth from the corpse's throat, echoing through the concert hall, thrown into every corner by the carefully-designed acoustics. And there was Garret Jacob Hobbs, clapping, getting to his feet now, a standing ovation for Will's performance.

But as he played, the un-sound dissipated, replaced by a soft adagio for strings. Real music, not the guttural serenade Tobias Budge had composed to romance... someone.

Will came back to himself. Hannibal had risen from his chair and put on some music to fight the quiet. Will got to his feet, hoping he hadn't faded out for long.

They sat opposite one another and drank in silence, letting the warm, mellow, yet melancholic chamber music surround them.

"Tell me what happened," Hannibal requested, "at the string shop."

"Uhm..." Will rubbed his cheek absently, trying not to visualize the dead police officers, or think about how Budge might have killed all three of them instead of just the two. "He had a student there. The kid left, and we got to talking about catgut. He-he said all of his was imported, but – I could tell something was off. He had knowledge of the Wilson murder that we hadn't released to the press. But j-just as I was going to start really q-questioning him, I heard something outside." He licked his bottom lip and drew it in his mouth briefly before exhaling sharply and shaking his head. "It was an auditory hallucination. Like the raccoon in the chimney."

"What did you hear?" Hannibal queried, one brow piqued in interest.

Will took a deep breath, and let his gaze wander, apprehensive about looking at Hannibal directly, lest the tears return. "I heard what I heard the night my mom– my mom, ah, hit that guy and his dog on the country road." He took another shaky breath. "It was like I was five years old again. It sounded *so real*."

Hannibal rested his chin on his hand, index finger extended, lingering by a developing bruise beneath his sharp cheekbone. "Real enough that you went outside to investigate."

"Y-yeah," Will admitted. "And when I came back in, I found one of the uniforms dead. I went down to the basement and found the other one. I was trying to see if he was still alive when Budge attacked me from behind. He-he was trying to strangle me, but I got my hands up in time."

"With your gun drawn." Will nodded. "That explains the piece of his ear that was missing."

"Like I said, I should have blown his brains out," Will said darkly, turning his attention to the crackling flames in the hearth.

They were quiet for a time. The orchestral movement on the stereo ended, and another began.

"Bach's 'Come Sweet Death,'" Hannibal said after a time, gesturing to the stereo. "Do you like it?"

"There's nothing sweet about death," Will blurted after gulping his whiskey. "At least, not for the people you leave behind."

"I disagree." Hannibal leaned forward to collect his glass of brandy. Will was very aware of the small huff of discomfort that came from him as he bent to do so. "Reminders of our own mortality ensure we do not waste our days. In fact, a close call, much like what transpired today, can have the opposite effect, making one feel more invigorated. Sometimes even verile." He swallowed the brandy in a single mouthful.

"Are you in a lot of pain?" Will wanted to know, leaning forward and putting his elbows on his knees.

"There is discomfort, naturally. But not enough to deter me. I would like to make love, Will, if you're willing."

Will's breath caught, flushing again at such a direct request. "Yes," he said quietly.

"Good." Hannibal poured himself another drink and put it to his lips. Then, "Take off your clothes and get on the bed." When Will didn't move immediately, he added, "Please."

Will wrestled away his self-consciousness and stood, going to the side of the bed he'd dared to begin thinking of as his. He kicked off his shoes, removed his socks, and unbuttoned the cuffs of his shirt, all the while feeling Hannibal's gaze climbing all over him, soft but somehow hungry, arachnid. He turned his back on Hannibal and fumbled with his collar buttons.

But Hannibal was there very suddenly behind him, reaching around to arrest the motion of his fingers. He covered Will's hands with his own, twining their fingers together, leaning his face into the side of Will's head and neck. Will could hear the depth and sudden increase in his breathing, could feel the press of him from behind, the outline of his desire.

"Couldn't wait?" Will felt a small smirk form on his mouth.

"No," Hannibal confirmed, releasing Will's hands and expertly unfastening the rest of the buttons before easing him out of his shirt and letting it fall. He turned Will gently by his hips and unclasped his belt before sliding down his pants and underwear together.

He tried to kneel before Will, but Will caught his arm quickly. "No," he said, trying to make his voice firm, authoritative. "Not with your leg wound." Will stepped out of his clothes on his own, then opened Hannibal's robe. He was bare beneath it, covered only with the remnants of his struggle with Tobias.

Hannibal opened his arms, and Will melded into him, enveloped in his presence. When Hannibal lifted his chin gently up, bringing their lips together, he submitted willingly, then hungrily.

Will allowed himself to put his fingers in Hannibal's hair, marveling at its full softness, his other hand on an exploratory mission, caressing the warm muscle of Hannibal's lower back, fingertips defining the vertebrae. Hannibal held him close, almost crushingly so, by the back of his neck and a hand splayed out over his backside. Their kisses came in waves, deep as the tide came in, then sweet and shallow as it rolled back out again.

Hannibal slid his arm beneath one of Will's, and the hand on his ass traveled down behind his knee as Hannibal bent and lifted him the short way onto the bed, depositing him on the pillows. Will reached for him and Hannibal slid next to him, emitting a soft groan that he had clearly tried to keep at bay. Will took him by the lapel of his robe to bring their mouths together again, then slung his leg over to sit on Hannibal's hips without breaking their kiss. Hannibal's large warm hands caressed his flesh, reading his old scars and new wounds like braille, thumbing the marks on his neck gently, then kissing them. He rose gently and shifted Will under him before sliding off his last article of clothing, then breaking their kiss.

"Lay back," he whispered.

"Hannibal, you're–"

"Will." A name, a command. Will obeyed.

Hannibal positioned himself lower on the bed, then reached out a hand for Will to hold, twining their fingers together in a reassuring grip. Will closed his eyes, arm behind his head. Oh *God* that mouth was amazing. He bit his lip to keep quiet. Behind his eyes, images twisted themselves together — a standing ovation from Garret Jacob Hobbs, the dead cops at the Chordophone String Shop, ribbed piles of intestines stuffed into jars, blood eagles, Cassie Boyle as a folk horror sacrifice, Abigail's blood spraying up from her neck–

"Will."

He opened his eyes and looked down at Hannibal, who was resting his chin against Will's navel. "Where are you?" he said softly.

"What do you mean?"

"Still hearing a killer's serenade?" Hannibal traced the line of hair that moved south along Will's lower abdomen. "You said it was 'our song'. Yours and his."

Will rubbed his eyes with his free hand. Hannibal climbed up to lay next to him, again emitting an exhale that clearly denoted his soreness. "We can stop," he said.

"No. I want to be with you," Will said, and he did. He cradled Hannibal's face in his hand and kissed him, slow, then deep.

"Stay with me, then." Hannibal kissed him tenderly, then harder. Now softly again. He took Will's hand and returned to his work. Will watched him, stroked his hair, keeping the darkness of his mind at bay, engrossing himself entirely in the soothing, loving act.

Hannibal paused only to slick his hand, and apply a generous amount of the same product to Will. "I'm going to prepare you," he said.

Will froze, his mind static fear, but then tipped his head back in ecstasy as Hannibal touched him, circling his entrance before penetrating slowly with one finger, the other hand keeping Will hard with easy strokes. Another finger, and his other hand gripped Will's thigh with sudden possession. "I hope you'll permit me this indulgence. As I said, a brush with death can make one anxious to experience all life has to offer–"

Will interrupted by climaxing, loudly and unexpectedly. It left him weak, breathing hard, slicked with a sudden sweat.

When his vision cleared, he saw Hannibal smiling down at him, Cheshire, obviously pleased with himself. "This bodes well," he said.

Will nodded with a smile that felt vulnerable, but knowing. He turned on his side and pulled Hannibal's arm around himself. Hannibal splayed his fingers over his sternum and slid his other arm under Will's head, nestling his face in his hair, against the back of his ear. The expanse of warm skin, the softness of his body hair, his unmistakable smell all circled Will in a cocoon that he never wanted to leave. Hannibal's hand on his chest slid lower, stopped, then lower still. Will's breathing intensified again, and he could feel Hannibal's insistence against him.

"I wanted this the day I first laid eyes on you in Jack's office," Hannibal whispered, lips against the back of Will's ear, then brushing down on the corner of his jaw. "But I wouldn't have dared, not at first. But that night, you offered yourself willingly."

Will murmured in pleasure, then made a small, soft sound in the back of his throat as Hannibal continued to explore with his fingers. He was nervous, but Hannibal was right – something about this day, when they'd both faced death embodied in the same man, made him feel terrifyingly free. Any hang ups or misgivings simply evaporated.

Hannibal knew him now, in every way. Hannibal had killed to save his own life, just as Will had been forced to do to save Abigail. Will would never have wished this on someone he cared about, but the relief, the sweet promise of sharing such an experience felt almost as intimate as what was about to happen.

"If I had lost you today, Will, it would have proved the universe's abject cruelty," Hannibal admitted through kisses along Will's scarred throat, his tongue against the gouges of discolored tissue where the catgut garrote had bitten him. Will sighed in lusty contentment as Hannibal continued his litany of sensual touches. "To know you for such a short time..."

Will opened his mouth to call on God, not because he gave heaven any credit for this moment, but out of habit. He stopped himself just in time. Hannibal drew away from him for a moment and Will exhaled his protest in a little moan. "Don't stop," he begged.

Hannibal laughed gently as he rolled over to retrieve a condom and the lube bottle from the nightstand. "Don't worry. I'm far from finished with you."

He pressed himself back against Will, still in the spoon position, breath so warm against the nape of Will's neck. Hannibal took Will's body and adjusted it how he wanted, and Will let him, alert but not apprehensive. His arms went above his head, and Hannibal pressed up against him from behind, hooking one leg over Will's, the other out straight. Hannibal took hold of his thigh and lifted Will's outer leg, giving him access.

It hurt at first, but once Hannibal was a few inches in, the pinch and ache went away. Hannibal rested there, allowing him to adjust to his girth, the position they were in allowing him unfettered access to Will's neck, which he clearly enjoyed kissing. They locked eyes for a moment. "Keep going," Will urged, bringing a hand down to play with Hannibal's hair.

Hannibal was so gentle, so patient, holding him close like this. Will didn't even try to stop the cascade of affection that steadily grew inside of him, filling him like Hannibal was. The angle was perfect, and he was close again, heart pounding in anticipation of another gift of full-body pleasure. This was connected, he sensed, to the idea of giving in, like when Hannibal had tied him to the bed. He wanted to *yield* to Hannibal, give himself over, no matter the consequences.

"Right there," he managed, the last word distorted with a soft moan.

Hannibal was breathing heavier now, nearly panting as he briefly re-positioned Will and they found the rhythm again. They came together, even more in sync than any previous encounter, which Will hadn't thought possible. He could feel Hannibal shaking in its wake.

Hannibal slipped out of him, then pulled him close. Will nestled his head beneath Hannibal's chin, hand on his chest, feeling it rise and fall.

Dating, as Alana had said, was for other people. He didn't necessarily agree it was true for her, but the phrase had resonated deeply with him. *It seems like something for somebody else.* But Will could have this, nights like this one, such pleasure in the wake of mortal fear.

"A moment." Hannibal released him and got out of bed. Will could see the bandage around his leg was soaked with blood.

"Are you all right?" he demanded, propping himself up on his elbow. "I knew it was too much—"

"Will, it's nothing. Please." Hannibal disappeared into the bathroom. Will could hear him opening cabinets, and the distinctive sound of medicine tape being ripped from a spool.

"I need to tell you something," he said after they'd climbed between the sheets, Hannibal's wound re-bandaged. They lay facing each other, Hannibal languidly stroking his backside and thigh with one hand, Will pressed up against his chest.

"I know it was your first time," Hannibal said, kissing his forehead.

"No. Well, I mean, yes, but that's not what I wanted to say."

Hannibal waited patiently until Will spoke.

"I didn't kiss Alana Bloom to hurt you," he said softly, curling his fingers through Hannibal's chest hair. "I mean, I... like her— a lot, actually, but..."

"I'm aware. You were adrift. You needed your paddle, and I wasn't there."

Will sighed, snuggling closer. "It was like you said. A clutch for balance."

"I have been on the receiving end of several such kisses from you, Will."

Will looked away, shame searing him. He knew it was true, but it was hard to hear. He'd used Hannibal, as much as Hannibal might have used him for casual fulfillment. And, if that was true, he'd used Alana for the same reason. Just to have a foothold in this world.

"Do you see now why I hesitate to label our relationship? To assign it boundaries and definitions?"

Will nodded.

Hannibal must have sensed his sudden misery, because he visited several reassuring kisses on Will's mouth and neck. "As I said, Will, life is a piece of music. Sometimes in or out of tempo, sometimes harmonious, sometimes dissonant. Instruments are added or removed from an arrangement. These shifts give our existence texture." He kissed Will again, sucking briefly on his bottom lip. "And yes, these songs will end. But Will." He smiled, stroking Will's cheek with the back of his fingers. "I do enjoy our duets, don't you?"

Will let himself half-smile. "Yeah," he said. "I do."

"Good. Now, get some rest. You'll stay, won't you?"

"If you promise to take it easy from now on," Will insisted. "No more bleeding."

"I'll let you do all the work tomorrow morning," Hannibal promised as he drew the blanket over them.

And... CUT.

Now you're ready to watch episode nine. Pay special attention to when Will shows up at Hannibal's office after losing time in the wake of the human totem pole, and enjoy the subtext.

Stay tuned!

Season 1 Episode 9: Trou Normamd

Chapter Summary

Will's been losing time again. Tonight, he wakes up in Hannibal's bed, with no idea how he got there.

Chapter Notes

Companion Song: “The Ghost on the Shore” – Lord Huron

“I'm just a man but I know that I'm damned
All the dead seem to know where I am
Till it began on the night of my birth
We'll be done in a turn of the earth
Lie where I land let my bones turn to sand
I was born on the lake and I don't want to leave
Every eye on the coast ever more
Will remember the sight of the ghost on the shore”

This “cut unscene” occurs after Will ends up in Hannibal’s waiting room having lost over three hours of time. Hannibal tells him that viewing the human totem pole on the beach in Grafton, Virginia caused him to disassociate as a psychological defense mechanism. He questions why Will didn’t quit consulting for the FBI when Jack gave him the chance, considering they both know the damage the job is doing to Will’s psyche. At this point, it’s very possible that Hannibal knows Will has encephalitis, and knows that’s what’s causing the lost time (perhaps on top of the work he does). But either way he’s very keen on blaming Jack (driving a wedge between him and Will), and chastising Will for not quitting, even if it saves lives. The scene ends with Hannibal saying, “I don’t want you to wake up and see a totem of your own making.” The following assumes that Will left after the conversation ended. A few days later, Will loses time again during a class. He finds himself lecturing to an empty hall as Alana drops by for their first private interaction since they kissed. She admits she has feelings for him, but won’t pursue anything because he’s “unstable.” This scene occurs the next day.

There was no sound except the waves. Will stood in the frosty mix of mist and snow, sweeping the desolate but serene expanse of winter beach with his gaze. He stood at the top of a dune, his bare feet nestled in damp strands of half-frozen grass that stubbornly grew at the apex. The sun was a vague, distant being, featureless in the sky. Snowflakes drifted lethargically past.

Will didn’t feel the cold, only the terrible ache of a loneliness that felt as inevitable as a mortal wound, a pain that would only be sharper over time until the blessed end of suffering.

Down the beach, wading through the tide in defiance of the cold were a pair of female figures. They strolled lazily, as if enjoying themselves, kicking up water or stopping to admire their toes in the sand. He could hear their laughter on the edge of the wind.

Will broke into a run to catch up with them. It was Alana Bloom, with Abigail Hobbs at her side. They noticed him and began to move quickly away, their expressions now serious. "Wait!" Will called, trying to run faster. But the sand was deep, heavy and wet, sucking at his ankles.

"You killed my father," Abigail said solemnly.

"You're unstable," Alana added, with an apologetic smile.

They turned their backs on him and disappeared into the mist.

"Wait," he pleaded, his rib cage folding in on itself, crushed by their absence. He gave up, stopped running.

His dogs were there, he realized, and a flicker of warmth spread through his chest. They raced playfully down to the beach, each choosing a spot to dig. His pack dug and dug, sending sand flying in all directions. An icy dread crept over him as he realized what the dogs were doing. Each was digging a grave. And when they finished, each dog fell over dead into the hole they'd made, the sand filling in over them of its own volition.

They were gone. He would outlive them. And even if he were to die now, today, none of them would live longer than eight or nine more years at the most. And once they were gone, who would remember him?

The graves were opening again. He half-hoped to see the dogs climb out, alive and whole, while simultaneously dreading the sight of them ripping free of the ground like ghouls, rotting, reanimated. The corpses that emerged weren't dogs – they were humans in various states of decay, livid flesh coarse with sand, eyes vacant. The bodies clawed their way out, and then were lifted, as if by invisible marionette strings, into the milky gray sky. As Will watched, the invisible strings tore them apart, reduced them to pieces.

"Peace in the pieces disassembled," he murmured, a litany just over the waves.

The floating pieces arranged themselves on the tower, as indicative of ruin as anything in the Rider-Waite deck. The totem was complete. Now this, this was a man's life's work. This was years of planning, preparation, courage, and ingenuity. The monument represented these lives taken, yes, and also the ripple effect of the deaths visited on the people in the victims' lives. Their legacy was grief, emptiness, tears; the architect had inflicted unhealable wounds, and for that, he would always be remembered, even if his name was forever lost.

Will trembled in the totem's shadow. It was terrible, a piece of Old Testament horror. And it was beautiful.

And Will had no such totem, would never have one.

Never?

Maybe he could create one of his own. With Abigail at the top, its crown jewel.

Will sat bolt-upright in bed with a gasping breath.

The dogs startled awake from their places on the floor next to the hearth. Buster whined and Winston got to his feet, waiting for the command that he could leave his bed. Will ignored them, still seeing the nightmare even though his eyes were open, his consciousness split in a kind of double vision. Slowly, his brain caught up to his body, and his gaze held only the physical world.

Or so he assumed. Might not be true. He could be asleep, or sleepwalking, or in some kind of twilight realm where time meant nothing except that he was going to lose it, waking up somewhere else sick and disoriented.

The clock at his side read 5:54 am. The house and the land around it was still gripped in the winter night's darkness, a new moon stealing any glow that might have filtered down to the snow on the ground. Will caught the faint outline of someone in the smooth surface of the digital clock's face, and suffered a moment of complete discombobulation. That wasn't him. That was a ghost. That was a dead person with corpse skin and blackened eyes. He stared at the outline. It moved when he did. It breathed when he breathed. At last, he had to accept that it was his reflection.

I'm not dead. I'm not .

He was soaked with sweat. Again. As Will's breathing evened out, he sank back onto the bed, wincing in discomfort at the dampness of the sheets. Goddamn it. Not looking forward to more laundry. The thought of the mundane task, however, had a grounding effect.

Will sat up again and swung his legs out of bed before patting his thigh. The dogs sprang from their beds and came over to be petted. He stroked and scratched the ears of one after the other, chasing away the crumbs of nightmare that clung stubbornly to him. No reason to go back to sleep. It would be light soon, and the last thing he wanted to do was have that dream again.

He let the dogs out, showered, changed the bed sheets, and brewed some coffee. By the time he was dressed and pouring his first cup, the sun was coming up. The one advantage to waking up so early on his day off was watching the sunrise. Shrugging on his coat and stuffing his cap on his head, Will put on his gloves and snagged his coffee cup before heading back outside with the dogs. The sky was amazingly clear, so different from the murky atmosphere of his dream, and the dawn was rose-gold, the tendrils of light on the horizon hesitant and tender.

Will walked through the field next to his house, down the path he'd cleared to the small oxbow lake on his property. It was partially frozen, but the open areas reflected the dawn in a way that made it look like the sunlight had pooled there between the patches of ice. He stood and drank his coffee in measured sips, grimacing as it hit his empty stomach, trying to find a shred of that sweet and easy peace. Sunlight on the lake. The dogs playing. Damp earth. Coffee. His feet in his boots. Inhale, exhale.

Winston brought him a stick and he threw it, several of the dogs competing to chase it down. Max and Winston each bit an end, but little Buster was so determined to win that he chomped down in the middle. The bigger dogs lifted the stick and Buster hung there for a few moments before falling off. Will laughed. It echoed over the still waters of the lake, touching the ice with an auditory, though momentary, warmth.

From behind him came the slightest crunch of snow. Will turned, pawing at his side for his service weapon as panic gripped him. He wasn't wearing it – he'd consciously locked it up for the weekend and stashed it in the laundry room. If he was losing time, the last thing he needed to be was armed.

Luckily, it was not Tobias Budge returning to finish the job. Will's brain knew Budge was dead, but his heart had yet to accept it. No, his visitor was the man who'd killed Tobias Budge when Will hadn't been able to.

"Hello, Will." Hannibal stepped carefully down to the lake shore, navigating the trampled snow in his shiny dress shoes.

The dogs raced for him, but skidded to a stop at Will's whistle, plopping their rear ends down, though their tails continued to wag furiously.

God, he was fucking handsome in this light. Will looked away immediately, turning back toward the lake and bringing his mug to his lips to disguise his expression. Hannibal came to his side and they stood shoulder to shoulder, their breath misting out of their mouths in separate clouds only to mingle together before dissipating.

Will didn't know what to say. The last time he'd seen Hannibal was the night he'd lost over four hours of time, somehow blinking out of his conscious mind in the middle of a crime scene. What Hannibal didn't know was that it had happened again, yesterday. In one moment, he'd been lecturing to his class before lunch. In the next, he'd found himself speaking to an empty meeting hall around five pm, startled from his reverie by Alana's visit.

His stomach twisted around the coffee as he thought of what she'd said to him. Will's mind raced over all the things he should have said or done in that moment to make things go differently, or that could have prevented him from being so embarrassingly vulnerable in front of her.

"I talked to Jack," Will said softly, pouring the dregs of the coffee onto the snow at his feet. "He made… no indication that I was acting any differently than usual that day on the beach. Apparently I just w-went about my business." He emitted a dark little laugh, eyes still on the dawn as it shifted from pink to champagne-gold. "I couldn't believe it, so I asked Beverly Katz… she also, ah, didn't notice. A little distant, she said, but that seemed normal considering we were standing in front of a twelve-foot *obelisk* made of human bodies."

"A design we owe to the Ancient Egyptians, who called it *tekhenu* ," Hannibal said, eyes tracking a raven as it flew from one side of the lake to the other. "Representing a ray of sunlight." He nodded toward the fingers of dawn that reached between the trees and stretched over the little lake.

"I forgot for a second how precise you are with language." Will turned and started back up the path. Hannibal followed, and Will talked to him over his shoulder. "It's more of a totem, both symbolic and literal. A monument to the killer's legacy, his life's work."

They emerged from the path and onto the open field, now able to walk side by side, the dogs trotting respectfully behind. "I didn't come here to talk about the totem, Will," Hannibal said as Will looked at him in his periphery.

"Good, 'cause it's my day off." Will found his words gruff, off-putting, and was sorry, but didn't know how to fix it.

"I woke up this morning, very early, and wondered how you were."

Will let out a breath and smiled, small but genuine. “You want some coffee? Not sure if you’ll find it drinkable. I don’t have one of those… *contraptions* like the chemistry set in your kitchen.”

“Yes, I’d like that. But first, I brought something for your dogs.” They’d reached the house. Hannibal went over to the Bentley and withdrew a white paper parcel from the passenger’s seat.

Will brightened his smile as Hannibal opened the parcel and showed him several lengths of glistening sausages. “I hope they’ve been well-behaved enough to deserve a treat,” Hannibal said as the dogs began to bark, quivering with excitement as they scented the meat.

“Always.” They took turns tearing up the sausages and feeding them to the dogs. Will showed Hannibal, with some pride, all of the tricks and commands he’d taught them. Hannibal actually laughed aloud when Buster did his dance trick.

Will left the pack playing outside in order to give himself and Hannibal some privacy indoors. Soon, they were in the kitchen, coats off, Will pouring two cups of coffee from his decrepit, stained brewer. He noticed Hannibal actively trying *not* to notice the pizza boxes and instant dinner trays in his recycling bin as they sat at the table. “I haven’t felt like cooking,” he said by way of explanation.

Hannibal sipped his coffee silently. Will was glad he didn’t make the same face he’d made trying the “house red” at The Crawdad Hole. “Haven’t felt like it, or haven’t felt safe to do it?”

Will leaned back with a sigh, resting his hands on his thighs. “Haven’t felt safe,” he admitted.

“Afraid of losing time with a pot on the stove.” Not a question. Not even his eyes asked it, because Hannibal must have known it was true.

And it was. Will nodded yes. “I locked up my gun, too. Don’t know if that’ll help, really – if I can drive while I’m out of it, I can probably open a lock box.” He didn’t meet Hannibal’s eyes for a long moment, but as the silence stretched, he felt forced to look back.

But Hannibal wasn’t looking at him, instead studying the open shoe box that sat on the table between them, a little off center. Will suddenly felt very exposed, like he was sitting with his back to the door of an unfamiliar room. Hannibal reached into the box, but stopped before touching anything. “May I?”

No, Will wanted to say, but instead he nodded.

Hannibal’s deft fingers picked up a tarnished silver spoon from the hodgepodge of items in the box, examining the engraving. “Beau,” he read.

“My dad’s baby spoon,” Will explained as Hannibal set it on the table and gently withdrew a yellowed card that said “Washington Elementary School” on the front of it, with a pen-and-ink drawing of the president in question. “That’s, uh, my grandfather’s seventh grade report card.”

“Very good marks,” Hannibal complimented, placing it carefully on the table next to the spoon. Next came the same grandfather’s war medals, then a small unframed canvas painting. It depicted an idyllic town in the snow, with a couple seated in a one-horse open sleigh flying down the street with spectators watching from the sidewalk. Will deliberately didn’t look at it. There was something about the faces that was hollow, strange, and it always gave him an otherworldly feeling, like he was seeing something he wasn’t meant to see.

“Jennie French.” Hannibal read the signature at the bottom aloud.

“My great grandmother. She, ah, painted that in-in a facility. After having her fourth child she…” Will exhaled, then sipped his coffee, leaning his elbows on the table. “She probably had postpartum depression, but nobody really understood that back then. She spent a year there. Sometimes… sometimes I wonder if it wasn’t PPD but just… her life she needed a break from.”

“Do you think her struggles are genetic?”

“Trauma moves through generations,” Will said, and left it at that.

Grandmother’s rosary came next, then an Altoids tin full of baby teeth. “My dad kept them all. I know it’s… weird.”

“These are yours?”

Will indicated yes. Hannibal half-smiled as he shut the tin. “Your father played tooth fairy.”

“Yeah. He didn’t — we didn’t do a lot of other… like, Christmas. Birthdays. He couldn’t afford it. But every time I lost a tooth, I found a whole dollar under my pillow.”

Lastly, Hannibal removed the stack of pictures, some yellowed with age, flipping through them slowly. Will watched his family pass through Hannibal’s hands: his grandparents’ wedding portrait, Grandpa in uniform, his father’s graduation photo, a picture of Will and Beau each holding a large catfish, Will no more than ten. Lastly, a picture of his mother, dark curly hair askew, blue-green eyes alight, laughing, her arm around someone wearing a Richard Nixon mask. Each of them held up two fingers in a peace sign.

“You favor her,” Hannibal said.

“Yeah.”

Hannibal carefully replaced each item exactly as it had been in the box, and closed the lid, while Will refilled their coffee, desperate for something to do with the coiled tension in his body.

“You don’t look at these often,” Hannibal said.

“Not since I packed them before I moved here,” Will replied, watching steam rise from his cup.

“Tell me about the check you’ve left on the refrigerator.”

Will chuckled, turning to see his check beneath the dog bone magnet on the fridge. The sound he made was dark and bitter, like the coffee they shared. “You tell me.”

“It’s to an animal rescue. For a substantial amount.” Hannibal touched his fingertips to the shoe box again. “And you’re revisiting your past, considering what those in generations before you left behind. Silver spoons and trauma alike.” He paused a moment before reaching out and letting his fingers touch Will’s where they rested on the table. “You’re considering *your* legacy.”

“Wouldn’t you?” Will got to his feet and went to the sink to rinse out his cup. He caught his reflection, distorted in the shiny chrome of the toaster. The otherworldly feeling filled him again, deeply destabilizing – a ghost, a dead man that moved when he moved, breathed when he breathed. Did the exact same thing he was doing at the same time he was doing it. Like Garret Jacob Hobbs.

The figure in the reflection *was* Hobbs, now that he looked more closely.

Will forced himself to turn away and look at Hannibal instead, who scrutinized him with dark eyes that were simultaneously clinical and sympathetic. “I’ve revised my will and testament since the attack, yes,” Hannibal admitted. “Considered the body of work I will leave behind. In doing so, I realized that I felt unfulfilled by the idea that my remembrance should exist only in my professional work.” He stood up and joined Will at the sink, setting his cup in as well. They were very close now, and Will felt embraced by his nearness, though they never touched. “It leads one to consider the emotional wake of the biological drive to reproduce.”

“Children,” Will said, and Hannibal nodded.

“Perhaps that explains your attraction to Alana Bloom,” Hannibal reasoned, pulling away to look out the back window's pleasing wintertime vista: woods, snow, the dogs playing together. “You see her as a potential mother, as well as someone you can cling to for balance and stability.”

“She’s not interested in being clung to.” Will put his hands on the lip of the kitchen sink and hung his head in a brief posture of dejection before rising and rubbing his face. “She said as much yesterday.”

Hannibal’s eyebrows rose, a tiny motion, easy to miss if Will hadn’t sidled up to him especially to watch for a change of expression. “You spoke about the kiss, then. Or was it kisses, plural?”

“Plural,” Will said after a sudden tense silence. “She, ah, she said that she… drifts between regretting it and not regretting it.”

“Can’t make up her mind about you.”

For once, Hannibal wasn’t quite right in his statement, his words so much less exacting than usual. Was something distracting him, throwing him off his game? “No, she’s made up her mind. She said s-she has feelings for me, but, ah… I’m too unstable to be with.”

“Surely she left the possibility open, should the situation change.” Hannibal was right back on track. Will nodded, moistening his lower lip, watching the dogs criss-cross the backyard, leaving tracks in the snow.

“She knows it won’t change. She just didn’t want to hurt me, uh, any more than she had to.” Will leaned on the kitchen counter, arms crossed, eyes fixed on the old linoleum floor. “It’s for the best,” he said bravely, though it sounded thin. “I… shouldn’t have kids. Biologically. Like you said. Trauma rolls downhill. And who’s to say this thing I have isn’t genetic?”

Hannibal turned away from the window, coming closer, but still denying Will even a friendly touch. “Tomorrow we’ll go see Abigail,” he said, thumbing the edge of a pizza box. “And today you will permit me to cook for you.”

Will couldn’t help but smile at the thought. “You don’t have to,” he felt he should say.

“Nonsense. Get your coat.”

Smiling, Will went to the front room and took his jacket down from the hook, sliding one arm in, then the other, squinting a bit in the bright morning sunshine that came through the large windows.

He paused again at the sight of his own reflection in the window glass, and watched with a sinking heart as the ghost moved as he moved.

The tree in the yard became the flesh totem, rising up into the sharp, sunny Virginia sky.

And then it was dark.

Will wasn't standing in the front room of his house in Wolf Trap. He was in Hannibal's bed, on cool, silky sheets, Hannibal's body stretched over his, each of them nude.

"So many sweet things you've said." Hannibal was looking down at him, breath tickling his lips, their mouths inches apart.

Will's mind raced, the tang of panic rising in the back of his throat. He'd lost time again. Goddamn it, he'd lost time again, hours and hours.

Hannibal's fingers drifted over Will's brow, smoothing back his hair. Will's body responded deeply to the touch, both attracted and repelled by the physical sensations, having gone from a normal state to fierce arousal in the blink of an eye. "Say it again. Tell me again, Will."

Will stared up at him, breath cut off. At last, he whispered, "What did I say?"

Hannibal sat up and back on Will's hips. "You lost time." His voice was quiet, but held an undercurrent of thick disappointment. Will felt the crushing weight of a guilt he didn't fully understand, couldn't fully understand.

Will nodded miserably. "I'm sorry," he said. He had no idea the extent of what had just happened, but he could feel, through his ambient pulse, Hannibal's injury. What had he said? What had he done? How could he apologize for something he didn't remember?

Hannibal moved to get up. "We should stop."

Will grabbed his wrist and squeezed it so tight Hannibal made a little sound in his throat. "No," he said firmly.

"Will–"

" *No* ," Will insisted again. "Come here. Kiss me. I lost time, but I'm not afraid. I'm with you, so I don't have to be." He paused. "Do I?"

Hannibal pressed into him then, anchoring him soundly to the bed and headboard behind with his uncannily strong body. As if Will wanted to be anywhere else. Hannibal kissed him in desperate exhalation, nearly bruising his mouth. Pleasure, pain, pleasure, pain. Hannibal caught Will's jaw between his thumb and fingers and bit his lower lip, deliberately puncturing the inner skin, sucking hard for a long moment as Will dragged his fingers through Hannibal's hair roughly. Lips, breath, his own blood — Will tentatively closed his eyes. There was nothing behind them but dulcet blackness, his usual horror show driven away by the immediacy of compulsive desire, hungry love.

Hannibal took him firmly by the shoulder and the hip and suddenly he was splayed out with his head at the foot of the bed, hanging over just slightly, forcing his head back, chin up, throat vulnerable, Hannibal straddling his waist, Will's hands clutching his thighs.

Bending down slowly, Hannibal put one hand around his throat, thumb caressing his windpipe. But then, he let go. “Are you—”

“I’m sure,” Will said firmly, running a hand along his own collarbone. “Where were we?”

Hannibal took a breath as if to steady himself. Will wrapped his hand around him to deliver an encouraging stroke. “You make a very convincing argument, Will.” Gently, Hannibal put his hand back around Will’s throat, then ran the fingers on his other hand from the inside of Will’s elbow to the base of his thumb, then gingerly lifted his wrist to his mouth. “Damn your logic,” he whispered between soft kisses along his palm, running his tongue between Will’s fingers one at a time.

“Oh my God,” Will breathed, a hot flush rising up his neck and blooming over his cheeks.

Hannibal took Will’s finger out of his mouth to say, “God indeed. Feel that heartbeat.” He ran his thumb over the vein in Will’s neck that quivered with his pulse, and kissed him, firm but sweet, grazing his lips down Will’s throat. “Would you have me again?”

Will nodded, and Hannibal turned him onto his stomach, mindful of his arousal before opening the bedside drawer to lubricate his hand and himself. Hannibal kissed the small of Will’s back, then began a gentle but confident probing with one finger, then two.

Will made a small sound, hard to discern in its character, even though he was the one making it. Hannibal put his tongue there, and Will let out a sudden little moan that was much clearer in its message. “Do you enjoy this?” Hannibal asked him.

“It feels intimate,” Will responded, through a deep exhale.

Hannibal positioned himself and eased his way inside with care. Will moaned into the pillow and Hannibal, it seemed, couldn’t suppress a deep sigh of pleasure. Didn’t want to. Hannibal spread himself over Will’s back and ran his fingers through Will’s hair. Will couldn’t keep the feeling of deep-rooted connection at bay, of emotional and physical penetration, and he didn’t want it to stop. He tensed his legs and backed into Hannibal’s thrusts with increasing force, the sensations overriding the guilt and confusion. Another clutch for balance. Here he was again, flailing around in the dark, trying to find any hand to hold. Any port in a storm, Hannibal had said.

But it wasn’t, and the realization dawned on him as Hannibal’s anatomy hit him over and over in just the right place. When he was adrift, desperate to be grounded, *this* was what he wanted. Someone who was willing to take a risk. Because this beautiful moment was in neither of their best interests.

It was ruin, and he wanted it.

He was getting close, and Hannibal seemed to sense it. He dismounted and turned Will over to face him, his expression soft and loving. Gently, he lifted one of Will’s legs and held it under his arm.

Missionary, Will thought. *Like we’re together. Like it’s love.*

“Will,” Hannibal murmured with a smile, caressing Will’s stubbled cheek.

“You want to look at me.” Will’s last word was distorted with a sigh as Hannibal entered him again and covered his mouth with a kiss.

“I want you to *see me* ,” Hannibal panted when their lips parted. Will put his arms around Hannibal’s neck. Hannibal hoisted him up in a display of strength and pinned his back firmly to the bed’s headboard and the wall behind it, supporting Will’s weight as he continued his thrusts.

Will kept his arms around Hannibal’s neck, and his head lolled forward to rest on his shoulder. His lips, as if by instinct, felt their way to Hannibal’s throat, tasting the sweat there with his tongue. And then came the force of deep pleasure that radiated from where they were joined, taking a hold of Will’s body. He muffled his gasp in Hannibal’s shoulder, which seemed to drive Hannibal over the edge as well.

After a long moment where Will felt he lingered in a physical and emotional heaven, they collapsed in one another’s arms. Several minutes later, Hannibal turned away from him, curling on his side. Will pressed up against him from behind, winding a tentative hand around Hannibal’s midsection. Hannibal didn’t move, and seemed rigid, unresponsive to Will’s touch. Soon, however, the rigidity bled away, and Hannibal took Will’s hand in his own, pressing it against his chest. “What’s the last thing you remember?”

Will sighed, resting his forehead against Hannibal’s back. “Getting my coat on to come here.”

“I don’t know why you would dissociate in that moment.” Will couldn’t see Hannibal’s face, but he could feel the hurt coming through the pores of Hannibal’s skin where they touched.

“I saw myself in the window. My r-reflection,” Will said, feeling Hannibal’s heartbeat through his fingertips. “And I saw the totem. It looked… so real. I could see the–the eyes, each individual tooth, their hair moving in the breeze.”

“A flashback. Another common trauma response.” Hannibal traced his fingertips over the back of Will’s hand where it rested on his chest. Will pressed a kiss against the back of Hannibal’s neck, his lips tentative but desperate. “As I said, I’m worried about you, Will. I know how important your work is to you, and especially to Jack. But I wish there was another way for you to assist with these cases without putting such a strain on yourself.”

“I can’t stop.” The words were small in his mouth, and came out like little mewling things not meant to survive.

“Why not?” Hannibal turned to face him now, resting a hand on his cheek.

“I save *lives* . Hannibal – *that’s* my legacy.”

Hannibal looked at him, mouth pressed into a line. He seemed on the verge of saying something, but did not speak. Wordlessly, he pulled Will into a tight embrace. They breathed softly in the dark.

“I wish you remembered today,” Hannibal whispered against his ear.

“Why?”

“Because we spent it together.”

Will felt his throat tighten as regret thickened in his blood. “What did I say,” he asked, “right before I woke up? Something… sweet?” There was no answer. “Hannibal?” Still, Hannibal was silent. Will sat up and looked down at him. “Tell me what I said. I’ll say it again, like you asked,” he pleaded. “Just tell me what I said.”

Hannibal put a hand on Will's forearm, the other lingering over his thigh. "You said you felt broken. Alana made you feel broken. And I told you about *kintsugi* , the Japanese art of mending broken pottery with veins of gold. So that, in the end, it is more beautiful than before. Its scars come to life."

Will felt tears rise to his eyes. He blinked them away as best he could.

"And then you quoted Earnest Hemingway. 'The world breaks everyone and afterward many are strong at the broken places.'"

" *A Farewell to Arms* ," Will murmured. Hemingway was one of his favorites, right up there with Conrad and Twain. "Then what did I say? Or… what did *you* say?"

A flicker of pain crossed Hannibal's features, though he cut through them with an easy smile. "If you meant it, you'll say it to me again someday."

"What was it?"

"Let it be." Hannibal reached up for him and Will obliged, leaning in for the kiss, Hannibal's hand on the back of his neck. Will settled back in his favorite place, tucked under Hannibal's arm, head resting just under Hannibal's chin, where he could hear a heartbeat with one ear.

"Did I tell you the rest of that passage from *A Farewell to Arms* ?" Will asked softly after a stretch of sleepy silence.

"No," Hannibal said.

"Context is important. Though it makes the quote *uglier* ." Will rested his hand on Hannibal's chest, and Hannibal clasped his own over it.

"Does it?"

"'The world breaks everyone and afterward many are strong at the broken places'," Will recited. "'But those that will not break it kills. It kills the very good and the very gentle and the very brave impartially. If you are none of these you can be sure it will kill you too but there will be no special hurry.'"

Silence. Just the ticking of Hannibal's watch on the wrist close to Will's head.

"I find the context makes it doubly true," Hannibal said, "and many times more beautiful." He pulled Will closer to himself, and Will pressed in as tightly as he could, wrapped in a secure, lovely darkness, feeling threaded with gold.

"Tomorrow we'll go see Abigail," Hannibal promised.

And… CUT.

Now, start the episode again. The next scene opens with Hannibal and Will visiting Abigail in her facility, warning her against making any kind of a book deal with Freddie Lounds, which must have

been an earlier topic of conversation, perhaps right after they arrived. Or maybe Will got a look at the visitor log when signing in and saw that Freddie had come to visit the day before! Either way, this next scene is full on murder husbands/dads, and Will continues to grapple with the idea of his legacy.

… stay tuned!

Season 1 Episode 10: Buffet Froid

Chapter Summary

Will is losing his identity to the killers he profiles, diminishing, forgetting himself. He catches a fish, but doesn't trust himself to gut it. He finds his way to Hannibal's house to ask for some kitchen help. A dinner and romance ensues, along with a discussion of the afterlife. Do dogs go to heaven?

Chapter Notes

Companion Song: “Somewhere a Clock is Ticking” – Snow Patrol

I've got this feeling that there's something that I missed
(I could do most anything to you)
Don't you breathe, don't you breathe
(I could do most anything to you)
Something happened that I never understood
(I could do most anything to you)
You can't leave, you can't leave
Every second dripping off my finger tips
(I could do most anything to you)

Season 1, Episode 10: Buffet Froid

This “cut unscene” occurs after Will and Jack track down Georgia Madchen’s mother and bring her to the BSU. Will listens as Georgia’s mother describes the toll her daughter’s mental illness has taken, on not just Georgia’s life, but the lives of all those around her. Will can’t help but draw parallels to his own experiences. Jack speaks with Will afterward in his office, and admits that he is very concerned about what he’s done to Will. He’s worried he’s going to lose Will like he lost Miriam Lass. Jack promises to be a “bedrock” foundation for Will so that he can cling to the stability working with the FBI in this capacity. “When you doubt yourself, you don’t have to doubt me, too.” This scene occurs the day after that conversation and the day before Hannibal has Dr. Sutcliffe over for Jamon Iberico.

Will hadn’t thought he’d catch anything in the lake today, but proved himself wrong. He’d hauled up a good-sized brown trout after nearly losing it, so stiff and numb from sitting in the cold that his body had trouble responding to the bite on the line. He was warm now, from the thrill of reeling it in and plucking it from the water, as well as the exertion. It was one of his favorite feelings, this moment of triumph after a difficult wrangling.

As he hooked the fish over his shoulder, ready to go back to the house, he caught sight of movement across the lake. It was his neighbor, Karla, a no-nonsense woman with an outdated mullet-style haircut. He often saw her across the lake when she went on her walks. They were friendly; he'd asked her to let the dogs out a few times, and he'd been to her trailer to help trap a family of raccoons that had nested in the toolshed.

Will waved, then held up the fish. Karla didn't appear to notice him, sticking her hands in the pockets of her puffy blue parka and continuing her walk. He waved again when he thought she was looking in his direction. She seemed to turn and stare right through him, then disappeared into the barren woods.

The water was still, barely lapping at the shore, and the trees were motionless. Will realized that his ears were so full of silence they were ringing. He began to breathe faster, just to have something else to hear. A slithery dread constricted him. *She didn't see me. She looked right through me. I am not here. I can't be seen because I have gone.*

I'm dead.

Will took a shaky breath and set the twitching fish on the frozen ground at his feet. Hands trembling, he raised his wrist and checked his watch. "It's 2:48 pm. I'm in Wolf Trap, Virginia. My name is Will Graham." He forced himself to inhale and then exhale slowly. The air seemed to return to the lake, a breeze ruffling the dead leaves on the shore. "I'm not dead," he muttered to himself, slinging the fish over his shoulder. "I'm too fucking hungry to be dead."

That got him thinking about Chinese ghost food and *Día de Los Muertos* , the racing thoughts crashing in on eachother. He tried to focus on the present moment, listening to the leaves crunching beneath his feet. The ever-present headache reared up again, inflamed by his attempts to quiet his mind. It probably didn't help that all he'd eaten that day was breakfast cereal and coffee, and that'd been early in the morning. He was going to have to go into town and get something he didn't have to prepare – Will still didn't feel safe using the stove with his blackouts. He'd freeze this fish, hoping that someday he'd get to cook and eat it.

There's no coming back. You're putting up food you'll never get a chance to eat. He felt the disdain of his own thoughts deep in his gut.

He ignored them, setting the fish down on the kitchen counter. After putting away his tackle and hanging up his winter things, he rolled up his sleeves and prepared to clean the trout.

Will's hand trembled over the knife block, and he hesitated. The last time he'd cleaned a fish, seen the blood, he'd had an episode, coming back to himself within the mind space of the ambient pulse, crashing headlong into his own imagination. It was as if he'd woken up in Georgia Madchen's body. Her hands were his hands, and together they were carving up Beth LeBeau's face. Will could still feel the sticky, congealing blood on his palms, between his fingers, caked under his fingernails.

He hadn't killed Beth LeBeau. But he'd re-enacted it, against his own will, putting his hands so disrespectfully on her corpse. Contaminating the crime scene.

Was it worth the risk, just to eat a fish?

Honor every part of her.

“Fuck,” Will whispered hoarsely, rubbing his face with shaking fingers. That’d been Garret Jacob Hobbs’ voice, though the words had come from his own mind.

Who are you? Georgia Madchen? Garret Jacob Hobbs? Devon Sylvestri? What is your name?

You don’t know your own name, do you?

A mournful whine caught his attention. Will dropped his hands and glanced down at Winston, who was seated at his feet, looking up at him with an expression Will perceived as concern. Will knelt down, so grateful for the distraction there were tears in his eyes. He petted the dog, and pressed his face into the animal’s fur for a few moments. Winston licked his ear and cheek.

Will stood after a time and washed his hands, then turned back to the fish. *Strong at the broken places,* he told himself. *Kintsugi* .

He plucked the knife from the block before he could lose his nerve. “It’s 3:01 pm,” he told Winston, who stood at his side, ears perked up. “I’m in Wolf Trap, Virginia, and my name is Will Graham. And your name is Winston Wolf, okay?”

He pressed the tip of the knife against the fish’s belly. And then he wasn’t himself. He wasn’t Will Graham in Wolf Trap, Virginia. He was Abigail Hobbs in Bloomington, Minnesota, in fear for her life.

The knife is familiar in her hands, as if it had been crafted just for her, a legendary weapon given up by a lady in a lake. Nicholas Boyle’s hand closes around her arm, yanking her back before shoving her into the wall. Back against the wall. Trapped.

Him or me. Him or me.

Those girls, or me.

Her hands know what to do. The knife slides into him, so much easier than through the thick hide of a deer. She draws the blade upward as she’s been taught, muscle memory usurping any logical thought.

They look the same when they die. Nicholas, the girls, the deer. They gape and gasp and disbelieve. They don’t understand.

Will dropped the knife. It clattered to the floor. Winston started and backed away, joining Max and Buster who watched him from a safe distance.

“Fuck,” he repeated, catching the edge of the counter to steady himself. The fish’s blank eyes stared up at him expectantly. Will bent and retrieved the knife, sliding it securely in its place in the knife block. Picking up the block, he took it to the small laundry room in the unfinished cellar, and set it high up on a shelf, pulling a cardboard box in front of it.

Returning upstairs, he packed the fish in a cooler, put it in the backseat of his car, and drove toward Baltimore.

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The fourth time he called, somebody finally picked up. “Beverly Katz’s phone!”

Will blanched, anxious spikes rippling over his skin. He gripped the steering wheel of the Volvo with his free hand, squeezing so hard his fingers ached. “Uh… Jimmy?”

“Is this Will?”

“Yeah…”

There was a muffled sound as Jimmy likely lowered the phone to his chest. “Bev, it’s Will.” Muffled talking. Then, “I’m sorry, she can’t come to the phone — she’s up to her elbows in a chest cavity at the moment.”

Will laughed, but it was awkward and cheerless. “Okay.”

He heard Beverly yelling something across the lab, but couldn’t make it out. “She wants to know if it’s an emergency,” Jimmy translated.

“N-no.” Certainly nothing as serious as the last time he’d called, which was to have her meet him at the LeBeau crime scene and prove the killer with the decomposing skin he’d encountered was real and not a figment of his cursed imagination.

“You called four times, though,” Jimmy noted. “Ever thought about leaving a message?”

He had, in fact, tried it three times. Each time he’d been incapable of describing what it was he was calling about, so he’d erased the message and called back. Will hadn’t expected anyone to pick up, knowing Bev was at work.

Actually, after the second call, he’d gotten the feeling that the reason she wasn’t answering was because people didn’t answer phone calls from the dead. A ghost couldn’t make a phone ring. Or if she saw the caller ID she wouldn’t pick up, fearing unearthly voices from the other side. So even though Will didn’t want to talk to Jimmy, it was a relief to know he was still among the living.

“The connection’s, uh, I keep — the calls are getting dropped…” Will explained haltingly, words increasingly deflated. “Tell Bev — uh, I’ll just talk to her tomorrow.”

“All right then, I will certainly pass that along. *Caio* !” Jimmy hung up.

“Damn,” Will muttered, shoving his phone back in his jacket pocket. He’d been parked across the street from Hannibal’s house for almost an hour now with a fish in a cooler, trying to decide what the hell he was doing. As he’d approached Baltimore on the drive, his mission seemed less and less clear. He thought Beverly might be able to help him understand what he was thinking bringing a dead fish to his “friend with benefits,” arriving unannounced on a weeknight.

You have to stop running to other people when you lose your balance, his mind chastised him. *It’s not fair to them. You’re flailing around, desperate for a connection. It’s needy and pathetic.*

His phone rang and he jumped, a violent startle reaction. “Fuck,” he growled, digging around in his pocket before answering. “Yeah?”

“Hello, Will.”

It was Hannibal. Will’s breath caught as his nerves sang with a sudden anxiety. “Y-yeah, yes?”

“Come inside.”

“What?” The word leapt out of him and into the phone.

Hannibal’s voice was gentle, warmly amused. “You’ve been waiting outside of my house for nearly an hour.”

“I’m sorry.” It was a reflexive apology. “I’m so sorry, I shouldn’t, ah, I shouldn’t be here.”

“Will.” His name felt very final in Hannibal’s voice, a decision already made.

Will exhaled through his nose, leaning his head back on the car seat. “All right,” he said after a pause, and hung up the phone. Moments later, he was on Hannibal’s stoop with the small cooler at his side. He raised his hand to knock, but the door opened, revealing Hannibal dressed as casually as he’d seen him in charcoal pants and a plain white oxford with the sleeves rolled up. Damned sleeves. His weakness.

“Come in.” Hannibal backed away from the door to let Will inside, then shut it after him. “I wonder,” he said, cool and casual, but holding tension all over, “who you’ve kissed this time and rushed over to tell me about.”

Will’s face blazed and he looked away. “N-no,” he stuttered. “It’s not— that’s not why I’m here. I need your — your help with something.” He lifted the cooler slightly.

“You brought fish.” Hannibal’s eyes reclaimed some of their warmth. “Please.” He indicated that Will should follow him to the kitchen. Will set the cooler on the spotless island prep table and Hannibal opened it. “Brown trout. A beautiful specimen.”

“I… was…” Will struggled to explain. “I’m having trouble cleaning— using knives…”

“I see,” Hannibal soothed, retrieving a cutting board and the correct knife for the job. He lifted the fish out and spread it over the board. “He’s lovely. I wouldn’t want to spoil the freshness with a complicated recipe. I think poached in white wine will suffice.”

“Oh, no, you don’t have to cook it,” Will said quickly. “If you can just clean it and maybe cut it into filets…”

Hannibal put the knife down and looked at him. “Are you declining my dinner invitation, Will?” There it was, that little quirk of his mouth, the elusive smile.

“Are you sure? I, ah, just… showed up. Are you sure you want to reward that kind of behavior?” From the beginning of his response to the end, Will felt a smile climbing over his face and digging in footholds.

“Training you to bring me fresh fish?” Hannibal set the cooler to the side and slid open a drawer, withdrawing a stainless white apron. “I don’t mind that at all.”

“Fair enough.” Will took off his coat and set it in the nearby chair as Hannibal slipped the apron over his head, carefully moving his collar out of the way, wrapped the straps around to tie in the front. “You’ll let me help, though, right?”

“Of course.” Hannibal approached Will with another apron. Instead of handing it to him, Hannibal slid it over Will’s head, then leaned in close to wrap the straps around his back and bring them forward to fasten. Will was plunged into Hannibal’s scent and his nearness with the sudden shock

of falling through ice into deep water. When Hannibal flipped Will's shirt collar free, his fingertips grazed the skin of Will's neck. It was only part of a second, but he could feel their touch long after Hannibal had returned to the cutting board.

Will chose to wash his hands at the moment Hannibal cut into the fish to clean it. By the time he turned back, the job was nearly done. Once the initial gutting had occurred, he was able to watch the rest of the process with no reaction whatsoever. Hannibal saved the head and some of the trimmings aside, and separated the filets onto a plate.

"First, we need to create a fresh stock." Hannibal bent to retrieve a stainless steel saucepan from a lower cupboard and set it on the stove. In it, he combined the head and trimmings, and filled the pot with enough water to cover them. Will watched him measure out some salt, then hand Will a whole lemon and a juicer, the pointed end twisted like a soft serve cone. "Cut in half and juice, please."

This felt good. Will felt real, alive, seen. The tart scent of the lemon juice hit his nose and seemed to draw him further away from the depths of his imagination, from the place where the ghost lived. He glanced at his reflection in the glass door of the chest-high oven built into the wall, and smiled. His reflection had bright eyes and warm, full cheeks. Alive.

Hannibal had retrieved a bottle of white wine and was carefully measuring a cup to add to the stock. He motioned for Will to include the lemon juice, which he did. Hannibal disappeared around the corner to the dining room herb garden, and returned with some fresh parsley. Will watched him clip off the leaves, and add the stalks to the pot instead. "Aren't the leaves the good part?" he wondered.

"They won't go to waste." Hannibal swept them into a small baggie and placed them in the produce drawer. "Parsley leaves darken the stock. Using the stems prevents discoloration."

"Wouldn't want the broth the wrong color." Will chuckled softly, gentle humor at the expense of Hannibal's perfectionism.

"I wouldn't dream of serving you an off-color fish stock, Will." Hannnibal's lips curved in amusement as he drew out an onion from a basket with a lid that rested on the counter. "Slice thinly, please." He handed Will the onion, then selected the knife for him.

It was a good knife, weighty and well-balanced in his hand. Will hefted it for a moment before setting it down to peel the onion's papery skin. He was very aware of Hannibal watching him work, and his fingers were nervous as he picked up the knife again, catching a glimpse of himself in the blade. Still alive. Rosy-cheeked, even, as he blushed.

"Ah. No." Hannibal was behind him very suddenly, an arm stretched over his, hand over his grip on the knife. He put his other gently against the onion, chasing Will's fingers away. "Don't cut the root. The onion will start to bleed, and the smell will irritate your eyes. Like this." Hannibal cut the onion in half, then sliced from the root to the other end in small, measured cuts. "Let the weight of the knife do the work instead of applying pressure," he advised, taking Will's free hand and positioning it on the onion again. "Turn it like this. Push the sections together." They went the other direction now, resulting in perfect slices.

It was exceedingly tricky, Will found, to follow food preparation instructions with Hannibal circling him like this, hands over his, speaking softly over Will's shoulder. He was so, so close to pressing into Will from behind, hovering less than an inch away. Will could feel the heat coming

from where their bodies almost met. Luckily, while finishing the onion, he managed to avoid cutting off a finger.

“Well done.” Hannibal let him go and Will stepped aside so the onion could be scraped off the cutting board and into the stock pot. “I often add mushroom stems as well for a more complex taste, but they’re easily left out if you prefer.”

“Yeah, I’m still… off mushrooms,” Will admitted as Hannibal opened another cupboard and took down a bottle of something with a rich golden-maple coloring. He poured out two small glasses and handed one to Will. Will raised it to his nose and inhaled. It had a heady autumnal scent. “What’s this?”

“Calvados,” Hannibal replied, stirring the fish stock and increasing the stovetop’s temperature. “From the Brittany region of France, known for its apples.” He turned back to Will and held up his own glass. Will tapped his own against it, creating a brief but significant ringing sound.

“What are we drinking to?”

“It’s 7:32 pm. You’re in Baltimore, Maryland, and your name is Will Graham.”

Will let out a wry little laugh. “All right, then.”

The Calvados was incredible. Will could taste apples, pears, and something like butterscotch.

“You like it?”

Will nodded, looking at the remaining brandy in his glass, marveling at the rich color.

“Canadian armed forces were gifted calvados as they liberated France after D-Day,” Hannibal told him, stirring the fish stock and adjusting the flame beneath. “It’s traditional to drink it in honor of fallen comrades.”

“Hmm,” Will murmured, finishing his.

Hannibal sighed, resting his hands on the island. “Forgive me, Will. I’ve been entertaining more thoughts than usual about mortality since the incident with Tobias Budge.”

“You and me both,” Will said softly, playing with the rim of his glass. “Georgia Madchen isn’t helping anything.”

“Who is Georgia Madchen?” Hannibal withdrew a baking dish and set about buttering it.

“The woman who killed Beth LeBeau. The one who can’t see faces. I think you were right on the money with Cotard’s Syndrome.”

“You feel an affinity with her.” Hannibal quickly sliced up a shallot and sprinkled the pieces on the bottom of the pan, his movements deft and sure, almost automatic. “You said as much last time we met.”

“There are some similarities in our symptoms that I find… eerie. I can see faces, sure, but, ah…” Will drained his glass and licked his lower lip with just a hint of tongue. “I’ve been – well, it’s like you said. Thinking about death. Intrusive thoughts.”

“You’ve been fixated on your reflection as of late.” Hannibal used a sieve to separate the liquid fish stock from the other ingredients, and set it aside to cool. “If I didn’t know you so well, I’d say you were simply vain. But I believe you’re looking for something else.”

How was he so fucking perceptive? Will might as well have been standing naked in the kitchen, he was so utterly exposed. The shock of it brought out his contrarian side, and it reared within him like an ill-tempered horse. He didn’t give Hannibal the satisfaction of knowing how right he was. Instead, he asked, “Do you believe in any sort of… afterlife?”

“Slice, please.” Hannibal set a stick of butter in front of him, then turned his back to arrange the fish in the pan for baking. If Will didn’t know better, he might think Hannibal was buying himself time to think about his answer. Will dutifully cut the butter into thin slices, and Hannibal poured the fish stock into the baking dish. “Religion is a clutch for balance for the masses,” he said at last, getting out of the way so Will could put the butter slices on the filets. “It is often a tool for the justification of mankind’s darker actions. More often, it is a balm to combat existential dread. Who would not want to meet his maker and ask *why* ?”

Will crossed his arms over the apron as Hannibal carefully slid the dish into the oven. “You didn’t answer my question.”

Hannibal bought more time by washing and drying his hands, and gathering up the dirty dishes. “Yes, I believe in some kind of existence after death. Why do you ask, Will?” Now he was decorating plates with little bits of salad stuff, most of which Will couldn’t identify.

“I grew up Catholic, though we didn’t go to church often. E-eventually, I just… walked away from it. It–it didn’t make sense to me anymore.”

Will had Hannibal’s full attention now as he stood with his hands resting on the prep table. “I went through a long period of time where I thought we just *stopped* .” Will ran his thumbnail over his lip in thought. “That w-we just… end. Black *void* , nothingness.”

“Your feelings have changed.” It wasn’t a question, didn’t even pretend to be.

“I bought my house at an estate auction. The old man who lived there died in the house. T-these are the things the real estate agent has to tell you.” Will shrugged. “Didn’t bother me. But, ah… when I adopted Max and Ellie, and brought them home… I could tell they weren’t acting right.” He smiled ruefully down at Hannibal’s hands where they rested on the prep table. “I know how it sounds. But there were… *little things* that would happen. All explainable of course, but…”

“What sorts of things?”

Will sighed reluctantly. “Ah, things went missing. I heard — footsteps. Sometimes a voice from inside the house when I was out in the yard. And the dogs would bark at empty corners. Mind you, this was… *long* before I, ah, started working with Jack Crawford. I didn’t have a reason to doubt my sanity. At *that* time,” he added darkly.

“You think the old man’s spirit stayed behind?” Hannibal’s face and voice were gentle and questioning on the surface, but Will could sense an undercurrent of incredulity.

“I-I don’t know… *what* I thought,” Will said, drawing his fingers through the hair on the back of his head for a moment. “I said something about it in passing to my neighbor, Karla. She *insisted* on

coming over and doing some kind of New Age blessing." He shrugged again. "I can't explain it, Hannibal, but after that, everything stopped."

"The power of suggestion." The oven timer chimed and Hannibal put on oven mitts to remove the dish. The room filled with a rich, savory scent.

"Probably." Will watched Hannibal plate the filets. "I don't know. What I do know is…" he paused, took a breath. "If he was there… I-I know how he felt. Walking around in this world when you don't belong. But you're not quite sure if you're dead."

Hannibal turned and looked at him for a long, significant moment, before turning away and breaking the spell. He handed Will two placemats, napkins, and a bundle of silverware. "If you don't mind."

"Of course not." Will went to the cobalt blue dining room and set the table, placing Hannibal at the head of the table and himself to Hannibal's right. Hannibal emerged from the kitchen first with another bottle of chilled white wine and two glasses, then went back for the food.

" *Filets de poisson pochés au vin blanc,* " Hannibal announced as he set a plate in front of Will, and filled his wine glass.

The dish managed to capture the flavor of the particular species of fish without letting the fishy essence be in any way overpowering, or even too forward. It was a significant deviation from how Will typically prepared his catches — breaded and fried with Cajun seasoning. The food disappeared quickly, paired perfectly with the wine. As if he expected anything less as Hannibal's guest.

"I can do the washing up," Will said as he followed Hannibal and the dirty dishes back to the kitchen.

"I wouldn't dream of it."

"I want to," Will pressed. It wasn't just the desire to be a thankful guest, he realized. He liked being in Hannibal's kitchen, doing mundane tasks. It felt comfortable, form fitted to him like a well-loved sweater or a pair of his work gloves.

Hannibal, smiling, rolled up his sleeves again, and Will copied the motion. They washed, dried, and put away in a soothing, domesticated silence. After, Hannibal led him to the living room, and brought out more calvados. Will sat on the sofa and Hannibal pulled up a chair to his right. Will noted an oddness to the furniture placement – every other time, they'd sat on the sofa together facing the hearth. It put more distance between them, sitting this way.

"Tell me, Will," Hannibal said. "Why did you turn your back on the church you were raised in?"

"I know you're expecting some kind of complicated answer. Some big, ah, crisis of faith. But it was pretty simple, really." Will took a small mouthful of the apple-kissed spirit. "Father Landry told me that dogs didn't go to heaven. He had the, ah, *audacity* to tell me they didn't have souls."

A smile grew over Hannibal's features that warmed the entire room. "I see. Is there anything you miss about it?"

Will thought a moment, letting his eyes unfocus, the amber liquid in his glass losing its gleam in the softening of his vision. “Confession,” he said.

Hannibal’s eyebrows rose. “Confession,” he repeated.

“I always felt… lighter after.” He chuckled softly, playing with the glass in his hand.

“Absolved?”

“No. I never said the Hail Marys and Our Fathers. I think it was just the-the act of saying your sins out loud.” He drained his glass and collected the last remnants of taste from his lip. “Sort of like therapy, I suppose.”

Hannibal didn’t reply immediately, but Will felt something brewing in the silence, a cloud forming as the elemental forces required came together. Whatever it was, it was coming from Hannibal. The more Will acknowledged it, the stronger it felt in his mind. He studied Hannibal carefully, but couldn’t see anything different in his outward appearance. He looked the same as always, cinched and buttoned up, his face betraying nothing but a mild, friendly demeanor. Not a hair out of place, not the slightest color change in his skin.

“Do you have anything you wish to confess, Will?” Hannibal asked him after a considerable silence. “Anything to lighten your load?”

Will laughed softly. “Is there confidentiality? If so, I can tell you how I cheated on my taxes last year. Or, ah, maybe you wanna hear about how I didn’t tip the pizza guy last time.”

There was another subtle shift in the atmosphere that Will scented immediately. Something that Hannibal was emoting but not in any physical sense, like he was behind some kind of mask. Will considered calling him out, demanding Hannibal admit the obfuscation, but he had no proof whatsoever. It felt as eerie, unknowable, and deeply true as déjà vu. He had the sudden overwhelming sense that he’d said the wrong thing.

“I-I suppose I wasn’t taking your question seriously,” he said quickly, trying to backtrack.

“So take it seriously.” Hannibal set down his glass and leaned back in his chair, crossing one leg over the other.

“I’m starting to… fade.” Will folded forward to rest his elbows on his knees, pressing his prayer-shaped hands to his mouth at the index fingertips. “I told you before how I-I could *feel* Garret Jacob Hobbs – like I was becoming him. It seemed like we were doing the same things at the same time.”

Hannibal nodded, almost imperceptibly.

“I feel like there are times… when Georgia Madchen and I are– connected like that. Where we’re… interchangeable for one another.”

Hannibal didn’t move, didn’t speak, so Will continued. “When I lost time and contaminated the LeBeau crime scene, Jack said he’d ah, seen me, uh, confused, and upset, but never *afraid* like I was. I told him I was an old hand at fear. Georgia Madchen’s an old hand at fear. It’s all she’s known her whole life – that there’s something *wrong* with her. All the tests she must have gone through, and never once did they– could they really *know* what was causing her to lose her mind.” He took a shaky breath. “I know that fear,” he said, just above a whisper. “I’m living it.”

“Your test results,” Hannibal said, and Will nodded.

“And now she’s so far gone there may not be any coming back.” Will went to the sideboard and helped himself to whiskey without asking. After pouring, he leaned against the sideboard, shaking his head. “And best case scenario? If we catch her and she gets treatment, comes back to clarity and lucidity – she’ll know. She’ll know what she’s done. Beth LeBeau was her friend, but she couldn’t see her face.” He threw the whiskey back. “But she wanted to. She was desperate to. I-I can just imagine her begging God, *please, please let this be Beth. Let me peel back the mask and find my friend* . Beth LeBeau’s murder wasn’t savage. It was desperate and sad, the ultimate act of *loneliness* .”

Hannibal didn’t respond, just looked at Will, his eyes liquid darkness. Will refilled his glass and returned to his place on the sofa, not meeting Hannibal’s fixed gaze.

“Her mother – Georgia’s mother – came in to the BSU. Jack and I spoke with her.” Will set the glass to the side and leaned back, choosing to look into the dead glass eyes of the antelope over the fireplace. “She said that when she got Jack’s call she was… *relieved* . She was hoping – hoping this was the phone call she’d been waiting for. That Georgia had been found dead. Because to-to her… dead is *better* .”

The silence thickened. Hannibal shifted in his seat, a tiny sound, but it felt ear-splitting in the absence of anything else.

The dam had burst. Now that he was talking, there was no stopping it, no stemming the flow or patching the leak. “Her mother said that, in Georgia’s case, it wasn’t about finding a cure. It was about… *managing expectations*. There is no solution for Georgia Madchen, except her death. And that would be the easiest on her mother and the rest of her family. The tidiest end to her sad… *doomed fucking life*.”

“Will,” Hannibal said. His voice was thick, that one word, his name, almost unhinged.

“How long do you think I have,” Will asked him, “before I hurt myself or someone else?” He put the whiskey to his mouth, then said, “someone I care about?” before taking a sip. “What if that someone is you?”

“You will never hurt me, Will.” Hannibal rarely spoke in haste, but this promise felt completely fragile, unable to be kept, and they both knew it. “I’m not afraid of you. I am afraid *for* you.”

Will forced himself to slow down his breathing, closing his eyes and inhaling in increments before letting the air out by the same measure. “Is this the part where you tell me I need to quit the FBI?”

“No.” Hannibal got to his feet and held out a hand to Will. “This is the part where I bring you back to my bed.”

Will looked at the hand that was offered to him. “Jack asked if he’d broken me,” he said in a small voice, only fuelled by half a breath.

“Then we will repair you with gold.” The great tension he’d felt emanating from Hannibal had peaked, pushing against his mind like a change in barometric pressure. It was completely intoxicating. Desire crashed through his heart and his body responded immediately. He was instantly flushed, heart pounding, hungry to give pleasure and feel the sweet and easy peace he always did when he was with Hannibal, beautiful yet ephemeral.

Will reached out and took Hannibal's hand, letting Hannibal guide him gently to his feet. They went upstairs without speaking. There was something ceremonial about the walk, formal and symbolic, reverential.

The feeling ebbed when they reached the bedroom, the veneer of civility crumbling away. Again, it was almost domestic, comfortingly ordinary while being simultaneously charged with passion. Hannibal turned on a soft lamp in the corner and Will went over to the nightstand, pulling out his wallet and slipping off his watch.

"When was your last confession, Will?" Hannibal approached him as Will slipped off his shoes and left them by the side of the bed – *his* side of the bed.

Will furrowed his brow in thought as Hannibal sat on the padded bench at the end of the bed to remove his shoes and socks. "Coming up on thirty years ago."

"A long time to go without the lessening of your burdens. Do you feel lighter now, as you used to after confiding in Father Landry?"

"Well, I never said the Act of Contrition and you never absolved me." Will's eyebrow twitched — a hint of play. "You can't leave me like that in good conscience."

Hannibal crossed the small space to face him, took his hand and held it against his chest, laced fingers with the other. "It's been a long time since your last confession. Do you even remember what to say?"

Will pressed closer to him, watching the soft light climb over his features, losing itself in the deep blackness of his eyes. "Something about confessing my sins because I dread the loss of Heaven and the pains of Hell." He pulled free of Hannibal's grasp and ran his fingers gently over his face, the pleasant smoothness of his skin, brushed his hair behind his ear. "... who art all good and all deserving of my love…"

"May the good thou has done and the ill thou has endured profit thee unto a remission of sin, increase in grace, and reward in eternity." Hannibal slid his fingers around the back of Will's neck then drew them forward to cradle the corner of his jaw, and eased their mouths together with deliberate slowness. The kiss was deep, but ultimately gentle, and Hannibal pulled back after a time apparently just to look at Will, hands on either side of his face as Will freed the buttons on his shirt one at a time, then undid his pants. He took Hannibal's hands and pulled him toward the bed where he sank into the plush white comforter. Will wiggled free of most of his clothing and joined him.

Gone was the desperation; Will no longer felt the clock ticking, and Hannibal clearly wanted to revel in every second. He took Will in his arms and guided him down with another kiss, then stopped again just to look. Slowly, he eased his lips down to Will's chest, taking time to caress all his hard edges, to put his tongue to the soft line of hair that led the way south. He took his time, and it seemed he wanted to touch Will everywhere but his typical tenderest areas.

Will put his hand in Hannibal's chest hair to enjoy its silkiness, but Hannibal caught it and kissed his knuckles instead, holding it in his own. "You are," he said, voice low but laden with emotion and strained with lust, "the most beautiful thing God ever made."

Will pulled his hand free. "H-how can you say that?" he asked, nearly inaudible with the sudden rush of emotion that clamped down on his windpipe. "When you-you *know* how *damaged* I am?"

“Your scars are part of you.” Hannibal kissed him again, so slow, so sweetly, and finally touched him, which brought a sharp sigh of comforted satisfaction to Will’s lips. Hannibal lifted him carefully onto his lap as he leaned against the headboard. His touches had an air of restrained passion, as if he clung to his desire and kept in check in order to draw out these moments. His caresses, his kisses, everything was slow and worshipful, including how he grasped Will and himself together, and made love to him face to face, kissing his lips, his neck, the lines of his collarbone.

Will came first this time, and Hannibal released his hold, turning Will’s languid body over. After anointing Will and his fingers, he pressed into Will’s entrance, exploring and stretching. Will rested, breathing heavily into the pillow curled beneath him, then made soft sounds of contentment as Hannibal entered him, holding him from behind, face buried in his hair and neck. He ran his hand down Will’s arm and twined their fingers together, squeezing firmly as he climaxed.

Once their breathing had slowed and some measure of strength returned, Hannibal pulled down the comforter and sheets and tucked them in. Will molded himself to Hannibal’s damp, sweet-smelling body and Hannibal held him as close as possible while still being gentle. The last thing Will was aware of before slipping into the bliss of a perfect, exhausted sleep, was Hannibal kissing his forehead.

***

A ticking clock. A heartbeat. A deathwatch.

Will stood on the beach in front of the flesh totem, his mind and body leaden with dread. The sky opened, pouring torrents of charcoal-colored rain. It melded with the waves and filled the ocean, staining it gunmetal. The water spilled around the totem in torrents, washing up the beach and soaking him from the knees down in rapidly rising water.

Someone was holding his hand. He turned and stared into the hollow, distorted face of Georgia Madchen, locking gazes with her jaundiced eyes. He turned to face her; she mirrored his motion perfectly. He reached up to touch her cheek, and she did the same to him at the exact same moment. “You’re lost,” they both said, voices a bitter, devastating harmony, echoing with the rot of loneliness.

He woke up gasping, soaked in sweat. Above him were wooden slats, and beneath him was the hard surface of a floor. The tiny area was claustrophobic, dark, dusty. Will turned his head and peered out from under the bed. Beth LeBeau lay on the bedroom floor, her face carved like some kind of real-life jack o’ lantern, the mutilated result of his attempts to remove her mask.

Suddenly, someone tipped the bedframe up against the wall. He bolted to his feet to see Georgia Madchen standing by Beth’s body, holding a flashlight. She was wearing his jacket, and had his FBI badge clipped to her belt.

She reached out and closed her hand on his forearm. Will panicked and ripped his arm out of her grip. Her fingers sank into his spongy flesh, and stripped off his skin from elbow to wrist like it was a rubber glove. Will looked at his exposed dermis and tried to make a sound. His throat closed, blocking any air, and he was running, pounding down the stairs and disappearing into the black woods, the cold air stinging the hideous wound.

He woke up.

Hannibal's bed. Will sat up like a shot and rubbed his face, trying to scratch the dream off of himself. After a few moments of hard breathing, he managed to calm his thundering heart. Dropping his hands, he glanced over to see Hannibal asleep at his side, peaceful, elegantly handsome, even with unkempt hair. Safe. They were both safe. Will dropped his hunched shoulders and released the breath he'd been holding. He slowly lowered himself back into bed, then turned on his side to kiss Hannibal awake.

Before their lips could touch, he was startled by the sharp crack of breaking glass. He sat up again, blankets pooling around his bare waist. Impossibly, one of the bedroom windows had cracked open, and torrents of dark water gushed through. The pressure increased, and more panes of glass gave way. Within seconds, the bedroom was filled, lighter furniture floating to the surface.

The water crested the side of the bed and soaked them both. Still, Hannibal slept, even as the water surrounded them. "Wake up!" Will pleaded, pulling Hannibal into his arms. "Wake up, please!"

Wake up.

"Wake up. Will."

Morning. Sunlight filled the bedroom, piercing the gauzy curtains. As Will rose to consciousness, his brain did what he'd trained it to do – run a mental inventory of where he was, what time it was, who he was with, and if he was in harm's way. In mere seconds he knew he was with Hannibal, surrounded by him, it seemed, his scent and presence everywhere.

He blinked several times. Hannibal's bed. Hannibal lay on his stomach next to him, propped up on his elbows, book in one hand, his hair wilder on one side than the other.

"You were dreaming," Hannibal said gently, caressing his chest. Will slid over Hannibal's bare back, hooking a hand around his bicep, and rested his cheek against the warm expanse of his shoulder blade.

"Thanks for waking me up." Will bestowed a grateful kiss on the rise of one vertebra. "I had a dream that we were drowning."

"I'm a very strong swimmer," Hannibal promised.

"How long have you been awake?"

"Not long." Hannibal slipped a bookmark into his place and shut the volume of poetry, reaching out with a long arm to set it on the nightstand. Will slid his hand down and wove their fingers together with a sigh of relief. "I didn't want you to wake up alone."

"It's 7:39 am. I'm in… the most comfortable bed I've ever slept in…" Hannibal smiled – he could see the curve of his cheek from this angle. "And my name is Will Graham."

Hannibal shifted so they were facing one another, folding their twined hands against his heart. "I want you to feel safe here."

"I do."

Hannibal let go of him only to anchor his hand along the small of Will's back and pull him closer. Will tucked his head against Hannibal's collarbone and neck, closing his eyes. He felt warmth flow

through him as Hannibal traced his fingertips lightly along his ribs, down over the cut of his hip, then through his hair and along the side of his face. Lips on his forehead. “Want some coffee?”

“Not if it means you’re getting out of this bed.” Will wrapped his arm around Hannibal’s shoulder and curved his leg around him, pinning him in place for a moment before relinquishing his hold.

Hannibal caressed his cheek. “I’ll be back before you know it.”

Will allowed himself a long, uninterrupted look at Hannibal’s body in the morning light before he put on his robe and went downstairs. Will dozed until he returned a while later with a French press and two cups, which he set on the table by the fireplace.

“It will need a few minutes to brew.” Hannibal pulled up the duvet and tucked it around them while they waited for the coffee to steep, his arm folding naturally around Will’s shoulders. Will put his head against Hannibal’s neck and closed his eyes.

Sudden unwelcome images flooded his brain in a torrent he couldn’t stop. His mind transported him back to what he had beheld as he’d straddled Beth LeBeau’s corpse, knife in hand, taking in her gruesome smile. His first moment waking up in Georgia Madchen’s mind as the ambient pulse receded, pulling back the curtain on yet another horrorshow. Then the dream came roaring back, bombarding him with fear in a Doppler effect.

Hannibal tucked the blanket more closely around Will, half uncovering himself in the process.

“I’m not cold.”

“Then why are you shivering?” Hannibal asked.

“Remembering,” Will murmured, fighting the sudden rush of tears in his eyes.

Hannibal ran his knuckles along Will’s cheek. “Don’t minimize.”

“I was back in Georgia Madchen’s head.” He sat up and dragged his hand over his face. “Looking at my best friend’s body. That I m-mutilated.”

Hannibal guided his chin so they were staring eye to eye. “You are not Georgia Madchen.” He took Will’s hand in his free one, kissed it, then guided their mouths together slowly, fingers in Will’s hair along the back of his head where it met the neck. The kiss was soft, reassuring, almost innocent in its light insistence. Will felt the tension in him sap away.

Hannibal broke away, kissed his forehead, and got up to press the coffee. He returned to the bed with two large white mugs, setting them on either nightstand within reach, and got back in bed.

“Tell me how you are now,” Hannibal requested, taking a drink of coffee before putting the mug down. “In your head. Is it better?”

Will smiled sadly down into his cup, and took a drink. “Better. But I know it won’t last.” He set the coffee down so he could fold himself against Hannibal again, who accepted his embrace readily.

Will put his ear over Hannibal’s heart and closed his eyes once more, relishing the sound, the feel of Hannibal’s fingers brushing his hair back, tracing lightly along the back of his ear, down his neck, then along the corner of his jaw to his chin and back again. “Bob Dylan said that when you got nothin’ you got nothin’ to lose. You’re *invisible* with no secrets to conceal.” He put his

fingertips against Hannibal's chest, traced his nipple, then back around his hip. "I'm feeling very *visible* . And still not… convinced that something could happen to you. Or Abigail. I-I know Budge is dead. I know Stammets is in prison. It's irrational, but…" He sighed. "And what if I…? I mean, if G-Georgia Madchen could lose touch with her reality to the point of doing what she did to her best friend…." Will shook his head. "N-never mind. I'll stop."

"Tell me what you need."

Will sat up against the pillows and headboard again, Hannibal's arm around him still. "I'm back in the, ah, confession booth again, aren't I?" He grasped at a shred of levity. "Don't I still owe you some Hail Marys from last night?" he asked lightly.

Hannibal gave him a gentle smile, eyes glinting with a touch of humor. "I absolved you."

"Oh, is that what the kids are calling it these days?" Will grasped onto the playful thread of the conversation and pulled, hoping it would unravel his tension, get rid of the unexpected flashbacks, even if only for a short time. "You can absolve me all night."

"I already have." Hannibal let him go for a moment to slide a leg over, knees on either side of Will's outstretched legs. He ran his hands down Will's arms, resting them in the crooks of his elbows, and leaned in to kiss him, once softly, then again, with more pressure. "But if you feel a strong desire to pray, I won't stop you." Another kiss, light again. Will tried to shift closer, reaching for his mouth with his own lips, but Hannibal denied him, pulling back. "I can't help it — I'd like to see you on your knees."

"That can be arranged," Will promised as Hannibal leaned in again, more insistent this time, hungry. "Fuck, if this was what confession was really like, I'd be at church every Sunday," he said breathlessly as Hannibal tossed a pillow out of their way and moved his mouth down along Will's neck.

"I'll have you talking to God soon enough."

"Is that a promise or a threat?" It was Will's turn to evade Hannibal's insistent mouth. Smirking, he moved to slide out from underneath Hannibal. "Need a coffee refill?"

"No," Hannibal insisted, catching him before he could escape, maneuvering to keep him against the headboard.

"Careful. You don't want to try that." Will arched an eyebrow as Hannibal caught his fingers in his hair, thumb next to his ear, his other hand around Will's wrist. "You forget I used to be a cop." He traced his fingers from Hannibal's navel lower, lower—

"Oh, of course… the homicide detective." Hannibal mocked in perfect good humor, releasing his hair and taking his other wrist, pushing it into the headboard.

"You can't hold me if I don't want to be held."

"Is that so?"

"Mmm-hmm. It's the only thing I have in common with a cat—" Hannibal silenced him with another kiss, deeper this time, thrilling in its intensity. It left him breathing hard.

“You must want to be held, then, because you’re not trying very hard.” Hannibal said into his neck where he’d been working his tongue along the hollow of Will’s collarbone.

“I don’t want to, ah, show you up or anything—” Will caught his breath. He was pushing now, pretty hard, but Hannibal’s grip was iron and immobile. He squirmed again, looking for leverage. This was fun, but he was actually curious what Hannibal’s limits were. His resistance pressed harder, and Will couldn’t stop the sudden sharp inhale of pain as his wrist ground into the headboard under the intense pressure.

Hannibal pressed their mouths together with more force, and then with sudden fury, hauling Will up by his hips and forcing him against the wall and headboard. Will’s breath was shoved out his lungs by the impact as Hannibal pinned him, not as expertly as a trained fighter might have done, but with a raw strength, aided by his naturally larger size and broader build. Hannibal kissed him feverishly, then put his mouth against the place where Will’s shoulder eased into his neck and bit down, his signature mark. Will made a sharp sound of pain and pleasure and Hannibal pivoted him suddenly, tossing him carelessly down on the bed and trapping one arm above his head, the other snaking along Will’s thigh and behind his knee, lifting his leg over his shoulder. He entered roughly, and his grip on Will’s wrist and ankle were unyielding.

The angle was perfect, and he was luckily still somewhat lubricated from the previous night. “Oh my God — yes—” Will managed as Hannibal’s movements became faster, more and more insistent. And then his vision went white, flecked with sparks, and faded to black. Hannibal managed to pull out before he collapsed, sweaty and exhausted, over Will’s prone body, in much the same state.

“I told you,” Hannibal said as he regained his breath, rolling onto his back, “that you’d be calling out to God.”

Will laughed softly through his labored breaths, resting his head on his folded arms. Their heads were at the right hand edge of the bed now, and he dangled one arm limply over the side, using the other for a pillow.

“Now, do you understand,” Hannibal said, just above a whisper, “that I don’t see you as broken?”

Will’s smile faded. He didn’t answer.

“Do you need me to convince you again?” Hannibal rolled him over and hooked his arm behind Will’s head.

Will squirmed free and got on top, sitting on Hannibal’s hips, which he allowed, spreading his hands on the small of Will’s back and then down to cup his backside. Will again enjoyed the wooly softness of Hannibal’s chest hair before giving it a tiny playful tug. “I’m convinced,” he admitted, and leaned over to kiss him.

Hannibal pulled him down into an embrace, then tucked Will against himself, pressing his face into the back of his shoulder and neck, arms around him tightly, one curled just right so Will could use it for a pillow. Will reached down and snagged the blanket and dragged it over them.

It wasn’t long before Hannibal’s alarm went off, a sweet, music-box-like song. Will groaned and Hannibal gave his shoulder an apologetic squeeze. “I have patients this morning.”

“Yeah, I need to go in to Quantico,” Will sighed. “Why don’t you get ready and I’ll make some kinda breakfast.”

“What would you make for me?” Hannibal tilted Will’s head back by running his hand along his forehead and then through his hair. He put his lips against Will’s neck, then his mouth. “I’m afraid I don’t keep frozen waffles or breakfast cereal in the house.”

“I can fry a fucking egg, Hannibal,” Will growled in mock-irritation.

Hannibal sat up on his elbow and caressed Will’s cheek, traced the lines of his mouth with his thumb. “Here we are again,” he murmured, “despite our good sense and better angels. I tried to keep away from you last night. But you had other plans.”

“I didn’t — I hope you-you don’t think I came here yesterday hoping… with some kind of — *agenda* .”

“No, Will.” Hannibal stroked his hair gently across his forehead. “You came here in pain, and I couldn’t prevent myself from wanting to alleviate it. I struggle to deny you anything.”

Will sat up slowly and moved out of reach, a sudden heavy stone strapped to his heart. “Well, what are *friends* for?” he muttered, a chill creeping over his voice like frost on a window, leaving it distorted.

Hannibal’s was soft, but carried warmth enough to melt him. “What indeed?”

...and CUT.

Start the episode again. Hannibal and Dr. Sutcliffe have dinner, and make nefarious plans to hide Will’s encephalitis from him. Hannibal serves Sutcliffe Jamon Iberico, made from a very rare, choice pig. Sutcliffe says, “Speaking of rare pigs, how’d you get yours?” referring to Will. This comment probably made it MUCH easier for Hannibal to murder him later at the hospital while Will is in the MRI machine. Hannibal frames Georgia Madchen, who shows up at just the right time, drawn to Will since he seems to be the only one who can see her and reassure her she is not dead. Hannibal is now the only person who knows about Will’s encephalitis, which he plans to use for his own ends…

… stay tuned!

Season 1 Episode 11: RÔti

Chapter Summary

After seeing an otherworldly thicket of antlers spring out of nowhere in the FBI briefing room, Will flees to Hannibal for support. He is slipping further away from his identity and is desperate for someone he trusts to tell him who he really is. Will admits that he'll be whoever Hannibal wants him to be, as long as they can have one another. But their interlude is interrupted by Will's hallucinations of murderers and victims from his past.

Chapter Notes

Companion Song: “The Day the World Went Away” – Nine Inch Nails

“I'd listen to the words he'd say
But in his voice I heard decay
The plastic face forced to portray
All the insides left cold and gray
There is a place that still remains
It eats the fear it eats the pain
The sweetest price he'll have to pay
The day the whole world went away”

This “cut unscene” occurs after Abel Gideon escapes and Jack calls in his task force for a meeting. Will has a vision of himself being surrounded by antlers, and Jack’s instructions to the agents begin to sound like an accusation that Will is a killer. He comes out of it very disturbed at his hallucinations, and goes to see Hannibal.

“What did you see?”

Will’s mind crowded with images of the forest of antlers, of Jack’s accusatory eyes. “A thicket of antlers,” he said, body heavy in his chair, exhausted from the day’s panic. Even Hannibal’s gaze felt like an added weight as he studied Will from the seat opposite. “All I heard was my heart. Dim, but… but fast, like, um… footsteps fleeing into silence.”

Hannibal did not speak. The only sound in the office was that of the fire that crackled in the hearth.

“I don’t know how to gauge who I am anymore,” Will confessed, his palms sweaty where he gripped the arms of his chair. Despair clutched at the back of his throat. “I don’t feel like myself. I feel like I have been gradually becoming different for a while.” He shook his head, unable to meet Hannibal’s direct, studious expression, choosing instead to look at the floor. “I just feel like somebody else.”

“What do you feel like?”

The words built up inside of him. He didn’t want to speak them aloud, as if giving them this would make them manifest, some kind of a spoken curse. “I feel crazy,” he blurted as they forced their way out of his mouth.

“And that is what you fear most.”

“I fear not knowing who I am.” Tears welled up in Will’s eyes, making his vision watercolor. Desperation burned through his chest, rotting into his core. “That’s what Abel Gideon’s afraid of, isn’t it?” Somehow, even though Gideon was a monster, it was comforting, Will thought, to know someone else felt the same way. “He’s like a blind man. Somebody got inside his head and… moved all the furniture around.”

“I imagine Abel Gideon would want to find the Chesapeake Ripper to gauge who he is. And who he isn’t.”

That makes two of us, Will thought, mind melting into a thousand possible scenarios, all dripping with blood.

“Will.” Hannibal’s voice was gentle but firm, reassuring. “You have me as your gauge.”

Will took a breath, feeling the tension in his chest loosen in increments. He nodded. Hannibal cocked his head slightly, studying him. “Do you trust me to tell you who you are?”

“Yes.”

“And how does that trust make you feel?”

“I want it to make me feel safe,” Will said softly, leaning forward to put his elbows on his knees. “But it doesn’t. It’s like I-I know logically that you’re right. But part of me won’t accept it. Is holding back.”

Hannibal regarded him for a long moment. Again, the only sound was the fire spitting and hissing in the corner, gone, in Will’s mind, from a comforting hearth to a gateway to Hell. He felt the tension build in him again, the desperation. At last, Hannibal stood. “Come and sit with me,” he requested.

Will got to his feet. Hannibal took off his jacket and hung it on the chair, then went over to the lounge and settled near the end that curved upward. Will followed him as if drawn by an invisible chain that stretched between them. He sat next to Hannibal but didn’t look at him, his eyes moving from one part of the room to the next, trying to avoid the fireplace’s suddenly twisted shadows.

Hannibal reached over and put his hand over Will’s where it rested on his knee. Will turned and looked him in the eye. “Tell me who I am,” he pleaded, just above a whisper.

“Your name is Will Graham,” Hannibal recited like an ingrained prayer. “You are thirty-eight years old. You come from humble folk, raised in a swamp with a curious, adventuresome spirit that the largest alligator could nor deter.” Will smiled briefly in spite of himself. “Your intelligence alienated you from your family and any friends you might have made as you went from school to school, state to state. You loved all animals, but especially the dog that came with you from Louisiana to Mississippi to Michigan and everywhere in between. Your only source of stability.”

The tears that had been threatening spilled over. Will dragged his sleeve over his eyes. “I told you about Bandit?” He didn’t remember, but that didn’t mean much these days. Bandit had been dead since Will was twelve, but grief still mottled his heart.

“No. But it seemed the most likely explanation for your affinity.” Hannibal squeezed his hand reassuringly. “Do you remember yourself?”

“He seems closer,” Will said. “D-don’t… can you keep going?” He felt weak asking, but this moment, these words, Hannibal’s hand on his, was the first time in what seemed like days he’d felt anywhere close to stable.

“Your work with insects and decomposition was brilliant. It showed purpose, patience, innovation. Your writing is sharp, clear, unadorned but graceful. It is reflected in the way you lecture. You have a way of making your invisible process visible, which makes you an excellent teacher.”

Will chuckled, wiping his eyes again. “I like to fish, Hannibal, but not for compliments.” He tried to pull his hand free and stand up, but Hannibal didn’t let go, and applied some pressure to his thigh. Will remained in his seat.

“I’m merely telling you what I see.” Hannibal informed him. “You said you trusted my sense of you.”

“All right,” Will said, looking at him now, falling into eye contact, a longing gaze, despite himself.

“Your ability to empathize with anyone, no matter what they have done, is miraculous. And I mean it in the Biblical sense of the word. By all accounts, you shouldn’t exist, yet here you are, as supernatural as a voice from a burning bush or a man rising from the dead.”

Will’s heart skipped forward, then stumbled. A feeling welled up inside of him, creating a sensation of a beautiful drowning, the shadow of Ophelia. “Hannibal.” His voice was only air coming from his mouth as it formed the word silently.

Hannibal let go of his hand and put his arm around Will’s shoulder, lightly guiding him down. Will lifted his feet and stretched out on the lounge with his head resting in Hannibal’s lap, bathed in his scent.

“And, even after all those treasures,” Hannibal murmured, running a hand through Will’s hair in slow, languid strokes, “God saw fit to make you beautiful as well. A barbed gift, as He will not let you see it.”

Will curled a hand around Hannibal’s thigh and closed his eyes, relishing the touch he was starved for, fingers in his hair and along his cheekbone, smoothing over his brow. They didn’t speak further. Will let himself slip into exhaustion in the wake of his emotional state. The fireplace’s music became melodic again, losing its brimstone quality. Will surprised himself by sinking completely into presence, concentrating only on the feel of Hannibal, the lap beneath his head, and the fingers in his hair, the other hand reassuringly looped over his arm. Gradually, over the symphony of the crackling fire, Will became aware that Hannibal’s breaths had deepened, quickened, ever so slightly.

His suspicion was confirmed when he could feel a change in the shape of Hannibal’s body where Will rested his head like a pillow. He tried to sit up, but Hannibal pressed his hand harder against

his upper arm and curled his fingers in Will's hair, applying a gentle pressure. "Rest, Will," he advised.

"But–" Will ran his hand up Hannibal's thigh, fingers getting closer to his outline. He was rewarded with another shift in Hannibal's breathing, though everything else, of course, remained cool and controlled.

"I must apologize. It's inappropriate for the moment, but the body can't always be controlled. Please, pay me no mind."

"All this… God talk," Will said, ignoring Hannibal's suggestion and stroking his inner thigh, "You, ah, you shouldn't prevent me from trying to *pray* , should you?" Will tried to move again and Hannibal clamped down, anchoring him with the hand on his arm, fingers tightening their grip on his hair.

"Feeling the desire to pray?"

"To get on my knees," he said, voice strained as halfway through the sentence Hannibal turned him on his back and lifted him behind the head and shoulders, bringing their mouths together. The kiss was firm and sure, anchoring. It brought Will a measure of that sweet and easy peace, which went to war against the rising tide of his desire, so powerful it made him ache. The two sides made some kind of treaty, leaving him in a state of pleasured equilibrium.

"Who am I to prevent you from speaking with God?" Hannibal relinquished his hold and let Will up as he eased himself back on the lounge. Will knelt over him, gripping the sides of the lounge, and boxed him beneath with his knees. He lowered himself gently in for the kiss, feeling Hannibal's hands climb over him, very aware of the frustrating barrier of his shirt. Will let his mouth roam away, across Hannibal's jaw and then beneath it, running his tongue down the outline of Hannibal's windpipe until it was blocked by the knot of his tie, then back up again, connecting their lips once more.

Will took a handful of perfect paisley tie and twisted it to bring Hannibal's mouth against his with more force, adoring the sensation of wrinkling something so pristine, savoring his methods of destroying Hannibal's poise. He released it suddenly and gripped Hannibal's outline, feeling it fill out beneath his fingers as he caressed it through the seams of his finely-made trousers.

"Tell me who I am," he breathed against Hannibal's lips as their mouths parted just enough to speak.

Hannibal's voice was strained, almost painfully amorous. "Your name is Will Graham. You have the most exquisite eyes I've seen on a human face." He put one hand against the side of Will's head, fingers splayed through his hair, emitting a soft moan as Will continued to tease him.

"What else?" Will sat back just enough to work his fingers into Hannibal's belt buckle, wrestling it free and unzipping him. He reached inside, but didn't concede his advantage just yet, worming his fingers between the trousers and Hannibal's undergarment, denying him a skin touch. Hannibal made a sound that was nearly a growl, a small, frustrated noise, fingers tightening over Will's hip and thigh respectively.

"I've traveled the world, and I've never met anyone like you," Hannibal professed, exhaling in relief as Will finally pulled him free of the clothing and delivered a series of sure strokes.

On his knees at the temple. Will locked eyes with Hannibal for a long moment, listening as his breath went deeper still in anticipation, then lowered his head and opened his mouth, running his hand up Hannibal's chest beneath his shirt to touch his erect nipple. Hannibal sighed sharply as Will pulled him in deeper, then slowly released, running his tongue back and forth on the underside in a series of quick, confident movements. Hannibal arched his back, putting an arm behind his head, the other touching Will's hair, then taking his hand, spreading it out against his chest. "You're *very* good at that," he managed through his jumble of breaths. "Will…"

Will watched Hannibal close his eyes and tip his head back, a delicate sweat on his forehead glinting in the soft lighting. The hand in his hair tightened suddenly as Hannibal's climax rippled through his body. Will kept the pressure on until the little tremors running down Hannibal's thighs evened out and disappeared. Gently, he removed his mouth, tucked Hannibal back in and stood up to pour himself a glass of wine from the decanter in the elaborate cupboard against the wall. He stood over Hannibal's prone body and drank it, ignoring his own arousal, content to merely observe Hannibal splayed out on the lounge, still breathing heavily.

In this moment, right now, he knew who he was. It wouldn't last, but that didn't matter. Right now, he knew. It was 6:28 pm. He was in Baltimore, Maryland. His name was Will Graham, and he *was* the beautiful, rare thing that Hannibal had the power to see. Perhaps that, he thought, was what he was *becoming* .

Broken and mended with veins of gold.

Hannibal sat up slowly, arranging his breathing. He winced as he adjusted himself and zipped up, buckling his belt with an air of reluctance. Will took another lazy sip of the red wine in this glass, taking time to note how the delicate mix of flavors melded with the aftertaste of Hannibal in his mouth.

Hannibal stood and straightened his collar and tie, then looked at Will as he smoothed back his hair into its usual coif of civility. "How is the wine pairing?" He asked, voice smoothed as well, emoting only mild curiosity.

"Why don't you try it?" Will swirled the deep burgundy liquid in his glass as Hannibal closed the space between them. He took a sip just before Hannibal put his hands lightly on Will's hips and leaned in for a kiss. Will passed the wine into Hannibal's mouth. A few ruby drops escaped from the edge of Will's lips, sliding around the curve of his jaw, dripping down his neck. Hannibal disengaged and chased them with his tongue before they touched the collar of Will's shirt, then worked his way back up to another kiss, twice as thrilling in its strength.

Hannibal reached between them to feel Will's outline, but Will caught his hand, despite his physical yearning for such a touch.

"Do you know who you are now?" Hannibal whispered, breath cool against Will's flushed lip.

I don't care who I am. I don't give a damn anymore.

"I'm who you're taking to bed tonight," Will informed him in a sexually charged but oddly businesslike tone. "Get your keys. You're driving."

A minute later they were in the Bentley, easing into Baltimore traffic. Hannibal pulled out his phone and glanced away from the road briefly to select a contact, then raised it to his ear. "Ms. Nathan. It's Dr. Lecter. I'm afraid I have to cancel our appointment for tonight." He glanced at

Will, a little smile raising one side of his face. “A family emergency. I’m afraid I can’t say more. I’ll see you next week at the same time. Thank you.”

“Family emergency?” Will asked, raising a coy eyebrow.

Hannibal put the phone down on the center console, then casually reached over to press his hand between Will’s legs. Will inhaled sharply, then exhaled out a moan as Hannibal ran his fingertip up the inseam. “As a healthcare professional,” he said with a self-satisfied half-smile, “my opinion is that this is an emergency.”

Hannibal parked a few minutes later, and they wasted no time. Hannibal fairly threw the front door open to admit them to the foyer. Will pawed off his jacket, dropping it on the floor, before tearing Hannibal’s away from his shoulders. Hannibal tossed it off in half a second, kissing him feverishly, moving his lips down Will’s neck and back up again. He put his hands on Will’s ass and lifted him. Will closed his legs around Hannibal’s hips, locking his ankles, arms around his neck. Their sizes weren’t so different, but Will was again amazed at Hannibal’s raw strength. He had to be doing something besides swimming laps. The secret of that strength was intoxicating.

Hannibal took a few steps and held Will one-handed so he could shut the door. “Don’t want to scandalize the neighbors.”

“There’s plenty of space between houses in this neighborhood,” Will reminded him breathlessly as Hannibal yanked open Will’s shirt further and ran his tongue along the line of his collarbone.

“Not far enough,” Hannibal told him in between kisses as he moved slowly for the stairs, “for what I’m going to do to you.”

Will squirmed out of Hannibal’s grip so they could ascend the stairs faster, kissing intermittently. Will freed Hannibal’s neck from his tie and tossed it away, lips on his, blindly fumbling with the collar buttons until they gave way. Hannibal responded by pulling Will’s shirt further open and then grasping it with both hands, shoving him against the wall of the stairwell hard enough that a framed engraving of Florence’s skyline fell free of its nail and clattered down the stairs. Will got loose again and took Hannibal by the arm, hauling him up the last steps to the bedroom doorway. Here, Hannibal lifted him again, then dropped him roughly on the bed. He descended on Will, pulling at his clothes, then at his own until they were skin to skin in a bundle of warmth, breath, their scents mingling together in a natural harmony.

Hannibal rolled off of Will momentarily and opened the bottom drawer of the nightstand to lubricate his hand generously, then pulled him into spoon position, adjusting the pillows carefully so Will’s neck wasn’t bent too far one way or the other with Hannibal’s arm beneath it.

Will breathed out a mix of a moan and a sigh as Hannibal played with him, exploring, probing gently, then with more surety as he kissed his neck, the back of his ear, sucking briefly on the little place where his shoulder sloped upward. “And you’re good at this,” Will whispered into the void behind his closed eyes. “— right there — yes—” He made another helpless sound of pleasure as Hannibal’s fingers pressed in just the right places. So close — then Hannibal pulled out and turned him on his back so they were face to face.

“Are you ready for me?”

Will reached down and fondled him in response. Hannibal guided himself slowly, gathering Will’s hands above his head with the grip of one powerful hand, and once he was inside, lifted one of

Will's legs and wrapped it around his back. Will rolled his hips to maximize the sensation, and gasped with pleasure as Hannibal began his movements. It didn't take long for the orgasm to creep up, and suddenly open like a flower inside of him. But it didn't stop, spreading throughout his entire body, wave after wave, and he couldn't keep quiet, just as Hannibal had promised.

Hannibal bent over him, still thrusting, Will's wrists still in his grip, and wrapped his free hand around Will's exposed throat. "Who are you now?" he demanded, the strain of desire distorting the words.

In quick succession, Will's inner eye flashed through the faces of every murder he'd touched, both perpetrators and victims. And suddenly they were all there, standing around the bed.

Garret Jacob Hobbs stood closest to where Will's head rested on the pillow, his eyes blue and vacant, a smug little smile on his chalky features, a bloody Abigail at his side. He could see past Hannibal's coiled shoulders to the foot of the bed, where the Angel-Maker knelt next to his victims, their flayed skin stretched toward the sky, hands folded in prayer. And there was Georgia Madchen, holding a strip of her own skin that had come off like a sleeve, her other arm around Beth LeBeau's waist, oblivious, it seemed, to the fact that Beth LeBeau's jaw was hanging on by a tendon or two, her tongue lolling long and wet. Eldon Stammets sat in one of the chairs in front of the fireplace, cradling a victim covered with vividly colored mushrooms, murmuring gently to her. And here was the Turner family, gathered in front of the dead fireplace as if posing for the family Christmas card photo. He could see through the holes in their skulls all the way to the other side, getting a peek of the off-white mantle. Abel Gideon stepped closer to Mrs. Turner, putting an arm around her, and mugging for an invisible camera, as if purposely spoiling the portrait. The nurse he'd impaled lurked in the corner weeping bloody tears, the numerous metal tools rammed through her flesh clanking miserably together. Beside her stood Devon Sylvestri, his hand deep in her abdomen, searching clumsily for her kidneys. On Hannibal's side of the bed was Tobias Budge, gazing down at them with a jealous, hungry look on his face, as though furious at what was denied him.

Will brought his focus back to Hannibal, who beheld him with a mixture of hungry lust and soft adoration.

"I'm whoever you want me to be," Will said. "I'm whatever you make me."

Hannibal came instantly as the words left Will's mouth, burying his face in Will's shoulder as Will gripped his back, digging his fingers in.

And then the world went away.

A roaring in his ears. He could feel water all around him, running through him as if he were porous. And then he liquefied, losing himself, his essence spilling, merging with the ocean. He was nothing, deconstructed, pulled apart by the tide.

He woke up.

Hannibal's bedroom was dark and comfortingly warm. There was a fire in the fireplace now that hadn't been there before. Two half-finished glasses of wine sat on the table between the chairs. Hannibal, asleep, stirred against him as Will moved, trying to get his bearings. He found his watch was still strapped to his wrist. It was almost 3 am somehow. His eyes darted the room, making sure they were alone. He had no memory of building a fire, of having wine, of even falling asleep. His muscles were tired and he was a little sore. Fine except the lost time.

Hannibal leaned up on his elbow and bent over Will, brushing his hair from his damp forehead, then trailing cool, soothing fingers down Will's cheek, throat, chest, stomach, lower. A thrill of confused desire raked through him. Will let out a disbelieving little sound, unsure of how it would echo, but Hannibal's expression didn't change — what he could see if it, considering Hannibal was bent over and licking his nipple, running his tongue down the crease on his sternum then up to the hollow of his throat before kissing him once more.

"Again?" he whispered into Will's ear, "If I haven't exhausted you."

Will tried shaking off the missing time, the sensation of dissolving away, but it was all he could feel beneath his skin, creating a disconcerting disconnect between what he was sensing in the current moment and the sensation of his dream state. Hannibal demanded his attention, folding a hand around him before descending with his mouth to suck for a few tantalizing moments.

In some kind of attempt to drive himself back to the present, Will finally put his hands on Hannibal, and they were insistent. He breathed out and made a mellow sound of pleasure as Hannibal responded in kind, pausing only to lubricate again, kissing him feverishly before breaking off to move his lips down Will's neck.

It thundered back then, the dream, or the essence of it, and the skin of his throat ached for Hannibal's mark, just to prove he was still solid flesh and bone. He sucked on Hannibal's lower lip, grazed it with his teeth, but released it when Hannibal pulled back, a leg between his, one arm around his midsection, the other hand stroking back his hair, mahogany eyes glimmering earnestly in the dim light of the moon. "Perhaps you need your rest."

"Stop talking," Will ordered, reaching down to pull Hannibal closer by the small of his back and kissing him again with the same intensity, his throat still burning, "and hold me down."

Hannibal hesitated, so Will reversed their positions in a swift instant, his instincts as sharp as ever. He pinned Hannibal beneath him and took him by the hair with one hand, tugging it to tilt his head back the way he wanted. Hannibal put his arms around Will's neck, but he tore one away to shove it against the bed with his free hand and crushed their mouths together again. Hannibal sucked in his breath as Will nibbled — though not at all gently — on his throat. "You said—" he managed.

"I told you to fucking hold me down," Will whispered, his voice strained with lust, pained, almost, a cadence of suffering.

Hannibal didn't waver this time. He pushed back against Will's grip and easily shook it off to get out from beneath him. They struggled for part of a moment before Hannibal forced him face down on the bed with his arm twisted behind his back, wrist shoved up toward his shoulder blades. Will exhaled sharply in exquisite pain, strained against him, and admitted beautiful defeat as Hannibal pushed his arm up another inch and took a handful of his hair, pressing his head down by the back of his neck.

"Like this?" Hannibal growled, and Will almost didn't recognize his voice. "Is this what you want?"

"Yes," he managed, mouth half-muffled by the pillow, then turned his face fully into it to muffle the adoring sound he made as Hannibal slid in and found his rhythm. Just as they both tensed to finish, beautifully coordinated, better with practice, Hannibal gave his arm a final twist, sending a bolt of electric fire through his shoulder that intersected with the pressure and pleasure and mellow discomfort of Hannibal's penetration in the final moment. His climax felt like a sunrise.

Neither of them spoke. They listened to the dying fire and the far-off rush of the highway. Hannibal held him tenderly, skin hot, flushed. Will felt weighted down, compressed, weak, a far cry from the surety of his identity he'd experienced only hours before. The missing time had robbed him of that confidence. He twined himself around Hannibal's body and held on for dear life.

"Will," Hannibal said softly.

"I'm having… I can't th-think," he managed, drawing a shaky breath. "I feel like I'm losing my mind."

Hannibal responded by kissing him softly, then with increasing ardor.

Will broke away. "Don't let go," he whispered.

"I won't," Hannibal promised. "Until it's time. And even then, I trust you'll find your way back."

Before Will could ask what he meant, the stag stepped through the bedroom door. He squeezed his eyes shut and prayed, really prayed, for the first time in many, many years.

…and CUT!

Now, start the episode again. It's the next day, and Will, Jack, Bev, Zeller, and Jimmy are in the lab looking over the bodies of the guards and orderlies that Dr. Gideon killed in order to get the Chesapeake Ripper's attention. The victims' organs were removed, but kept on site. However, their brains were scrambled with pseudo-lobotomies. Will ascertains that Gideon is planning to target every psychiatric professional who ever examined him. Alana Bloom is on that list. Later in the episode, after Gideon disembowels Chilton, Will, gripped by his raging fever, brings Gideon to Hannibal. Hannibal sets it up so that Will can have the opportunity to kill "Garret Jacob Hobbs" again… another step on the path to Will's becoming.

… stay tuned!

Season 1 Episode 12: Relevés

Chapter Summary

After bringing Will chicken soup and chatting about Georgia Madchen, Hannibal returns to Will's hospital room a couple of hours later to take him out for a little excursion to the botanical gardens. On the way back to the hospital, Hannibal makes a quick stop back at his house and...

Chapter Notes

Companion Song: “Nightshade” – The Lumineers

“Some of us love to think of life as a game
Others are born into the royalty and can never behave
Some find a freedom locking men in a cage, oh no
Some priest insisted it's a test of the faith
And only holy devotion can keep the devils away
There's only so much that a man can pray, oh no
Oh, my love
Oh, my love
Spare my blood
Spare my blood”

At the end of Episode 11, Will brought Hannibal Abel Gideon, thinking he was Garret Jacob Hobbs. He has a “mild” (Hannibal’s word) seizure and when he comes to, Hannibal sets him up to go save Alana. Will shoots Abel Gideon and passes out. He winds up in the hospital where his symptoms are treated but their cause (encephalitis) remains unknown to everyone except Hannibal. Hannibal brings Will chicken soup, and they discuss Will wandering the hospital to visit Georgia Madchen. This scene occurs about two hours after the soup lunch.

Will dropped the copy of *Outside* magazine he’d been trying to read on his lap with a sigh. The hospital room was nice enough, private at least, but the intermittent beeping of machines, voices from the hallway, and the clatter of gurneys rolling past made it impossible to concentrate. He’d just read the same paragraph about mountain biking four times, and he wasn’t interested in the topic to begin with. Following doctors’ orders and resting was much easier when he’d actually felt sick. A few days on antibiotics and anti-inflammatories had made a world of difference. Not only that, he’d been able to sleep. A gentle sedative coupled with the knowledge that if he walked in his sleep someone would find him before he hurt himself or someone else— all this made for a restful combination.

His muscles were still weak, but his energy level had increased to the point where he was getting restless. Hannibal's visit over the lunch hour had been a welcome respite, but now he faced the yawning stretch of afternoon and evening, and who knew how many more days until he was discharged.

He considered visiting Georgia Madchen again, but he'd been told in no uncertain terms by a very stern nurse that he wasn't allowed to just barge into other patients' rooms. Will eyed the television, but decided against it. The thought of watching programs about fantasy people with glamorous problems who were decidedly not losing their minds had no appeal to him whatsoever.

Picking up the magazine, he tried one more time before abandoning it on the table next to the bed. Will got up to stretch and paced the room. The window had a very depressing view – the roof of another hospital wing and a row of industrial HVAC units. The weather looked nice, but the window was sealed shut.

Will gave his tee-shirt the sniff test, and decided to change. Hannibal had brought him some clothes from home when he'd come with the soup, folded with almost obsessive neatness in his duffel bag, along with some toiletries. The Old Spice aftershave was conspicuously absent.

Reaching behind his neck, he grasped a handful of shirt and pulled it over his head. Just then, there was a soft knock at the door followed by its near-immediate opening.

Hannibal stepped in, shutting the door behind him. Will clutched the tee-shirt to his chest instinctively before his brain reminded him that Hannibal had seen his entire body uncovered on several occasions now.

Will looked at his watch. "Weren't you just here? Or… did I lose time?"

"The weather has taken an unexpectedly pleasant turn," Hannibal told him, crossing the small hospital room to stand right in front of Will. "I had a cancellation this afternoon and thought you might want to get some air."

"Uhm… yeah. I mean – am-am I *allowed* ?" Will asked with a wry smile, purposely lowering the shirt away from himself before tossing it on the bed. It was insanely satisfying to watch Hannibal actively try not to look down at his bare chest, demanding an absurd amount of eye contact.

"I've checked you out for the afternoon." Of course he had. Hannibal probably knew all the doctors on call from Johns Hopkins or served with their spouses on the Baltimore Arts Council.

"What, like I-I'm a *library book*?" Will curled up one side of his mouth, easing closer to Hannibal with the aim of catching his scent, so rich and wide, today carrying notes of amber, vanilla, and cedar. It wafted gently down into his lungs and ignited an instinctual lust almost immediately. Feeling significantly better in body had also called back his desire with a swift, searing vengeance.

Maddeningly, Hannibal only looked him in the eyes, though he could have easily seen the outline of Will's arousal if he'd looked. "Get dressed," he said. "I'll be in the hall."

The second the door shut behind him, Will sighed out a sharp breath of frustration. Not that he's expected to get Hannibal in bed while in the hospital, but still. Grumbling inaudibly, he pulled on some jeans and his brown henley before shrugging into his jacket and stepping into his shoes. He left his wallet and glasses behind.

Hannibal was waiting in the hallway with a wheelchair and CJ, an upbeat young man who had swiftly become Will's favorite nurse. He was almost a head taller than Hannibal, a gentle giant in aqua scrubs. "Hey there small fry," he greeted with his infectious grin. "Heard you're ditchin' me for a few hours."

Will couldn't help but smile. "Yeah, looks like it."

"Your chariot awaits." CJ swept a hand grandly towards the wheelchair he stood behind.

"W-what?" Will scoffed the question.

"Doctor's orders, Mister G."

"My doctor or Dr. Lecter?" Will demanded.

"You need to save your strength," Hannibal told him, a glint of amusement hiding in his eyes like the sun peeking behind a cloud for a moment of glimmering illumination on an otherwise dreary day.

"Hop on, Mister G," CJ encouraged. "If you behave yourself I'll let you pop a wheelie on the way to the elevator."

Will wanted to be annoyed, but he found himself chuckling instead. "Fine." He lowered himself into the wheelchair, ignoring Hannibal's offer of an outstretched hand.

CJ saw them to the patient exit, wheeling Will out the large glass doors. The Bentley was parked at the curb, hazard lights blinking like a heartbeat. "See you in a few, small fry," CJ called over his shoulder as he wheeled the chair back into the hospital.

"You did that on purpose," Will accused, opening his door before Hannibal could do it for him.

"It's procedure," Hannibal protested, but he was smiling.

Will knew true spring was weeks away, but the sun was out and the air was mild, silky with a promise of melted snow. He cracked the window as Hannibal drove through town. He didn't ask where they were going. The silence was cozy enough.

After a time, they pulled into a parking lot in front of a vast expanse of manicured gardens, still locked in their brown wintering. The land surrounded several greenhouses that gleamed gold in the sun, elegant structures of metal and glass. The largest and finest was also clearly the oldest, a graceful sloping shape of a Gilded Age design, hinting at the Art Nouveau to come. The lot was marked with a sign that read "Rawlings Conservatory Visitor Parking."

A well-dressed woman with a blunt-banged haircut that reminded Will of a flapper met them on the sidewalk as they moved towards the largest greenhouse. "Hannibal!" she greeted warmly, putting her hands on his elbows and leaning in for the air kiss. "It's wonderful to see you. This is the perfect chance to thank you in person for the incredible dinner last weekend. I am truly blessed."

"Daphne, this is Will Graham. Will, meet Daphne Dashiell. She's the conservatory's director."

"A pleasure." They shook hands, if you could call it that — she gave him a limp-wristed gesture like she expected him to kiss her knuckles. "Well, the grounds are yours. Everything should be unlocked. If you'll excuse me I'm overseeing the installation of some statuary for our spring

sculpture show. Oh Hannibal, you'll love it. We have a series of reproductions of 19th century religious work. I'm supervising the design myself."

"I'm sure it will be a roaring success," Hannibal said, pressing one of her ruby-nailed hands between his for a moment.

"Let's do lunch," she called over her shoulder, heading back up toward the greenhouse, then veering off towards the outdoor garden paths.

"One of your Arts Council friends?" Will hadn't meant the question to sound bitter, but it had come out that way.

If Hannibal noticed he ignored it, instead leading Will to the largest greenhouse with the sloped-dome roof. "The Palm House," he said, holding the door open for Will. "Made entirely of iron, glass, and wood in 1888, and modeled after the Kew Gardens in London."

The atmosphere inside the greenhouse was lush and warm, even more pleasant than the air outside. It smelled rich and alive, the air moist without being humid. Will breathed deeply and realized Hannibal was doing the same.

It was immediately clear that the gardens weren't open to the public today, as they were the only visitors. That explained the empty parking lot, Will thought. It was certainly a treat to have the place to themselves — no need to dodge strollers or try to see the plants around people attempting to take phone pictures of them, as if the images would really do the intricate foliage and flowers justice.

One of the plant beds had an information panel next to it labeled "Pretty Poisons." Will stopped to read the different species' names. Nightshade. Belladonna. Oleander. There were also several signs discouraging visitors from touching, and to keep an eye on their children.

"Much like your new friend, I should think," Hannibal said in his clinical drawl, dry as toast on the surface until Will picked up on his meaning. "Assuming she's pretty now that she's recovered from some of Cotard's Syndrome's physical effects."

"She is," Will said, even, matter of fact. He glanced sidelong at Hannibal to gauge his reaction. There wasn't one, except the little giveaway he'd come to recognize — the minuscule movement of one of Hannibal's jaw muscles. It was petty, but he wanted a reminder of the shred of power he had over Hannibal. Dr. Lecter had the money, pedigree, fancy friends, medical degrees, taste in perfume, and expensive wardrobe — not to mention a firm grasp on reality — but Will was beginning to understand what kind of influence over Hannibal he himself also possessed. "I don't think she's poison, though."

"I only meant that she was dangerous. She killed her friend and Dr. Sutcliffe."

Will's mood darkened as they walked away from the poison plant display. "I'm sorry," he said as they stopped in front of a display of tropical palms of all shapes and sizes. "He was your friend."

"More of a professional acquaintance. Still, a loss."

"He'd still be alive if you hadn't asked him to help me."

“Please don’t blame yourself.” They sat down on a wooden bench in the middle of the greenhouse that offered a view of a cornucopia of tropical flowers in every color imaginable. The air was warm and fragrant with delicate botanical scents, the sun warming them through the glass panels in the roof. Hannibal reached into his inner jacket pocket and withdrew a slim notebook with a connected pencil. He flipped it open and began to sketch, his pencil scraping against the paper in soft whispers. After a few moments, the outline of a flower blossomed on the blank page. “Is this girl someone you would consider a friend, Will?”

Will knew he’d told Hannibal Georgia Madchen’s name several times. He was deliberately not speaking it aloud, it seemed.

“She could be,” Will answered, leaning forward to put his elbows on his knees, neck craned back to look at the flowers. “I’ve only talked to her a couple of times, and just for a few minutes. But she – is – ah, in a *unique* position to… I think she could understand. So many things.” He pressed his palms together briefly, rubbing them for a half second before clasping his hands.

Hannibal didn’t answer right away, just flipped to a fresh page of his sketchbook. Will listened to the pencil scratches and tried to gauge if they were saying something Hannibal wasn’t. “What kinds of things?” he asked at last. Will caught him in his periphery looking in Will's direction, then back at the sketch pad.

“She knows what it’s like to not have any answers,” Will said. “She’s had periods where she’s dropped off the face of reality and had to claw her way back. D-do you know what she said to me? ‘They won’t find out what’s wrong. They’ll just know that you’re wrong.’ It’s like she’s lived my life, and I’ve lived hers.”

“I imagine she’s gone through a battery of tests with no conclusive results.” Hannibal used the pad of his finger to smooth a patch of shading on his drawing. He then withdrew his handkerchief and wiped his finger clean. “And you feel similarly failed by the doctors tasked with your care.” He went quiet, the pencil scratching becoming heavier but somehow frenetic. “Have I failed you, Will?”

Will sat up and turned to him in a swift movement. “No,” he said emphatically, feeling a clot gather in the back of his throat. “No, shit, that’s not what I meant.”

“Clarify for me, then.” Hannibal wasn’t looking at him, just up at the flowers, and then back down at his sketch.

Will sighed, glancing upward at the sunny panes of glass above them, at the blue sky that opened beyond. “There’s one… very significant difference between Georgia Madchen and me. Something that… guarantees we’re not m-mirror images of each other.” He paused, looking at his feet. “That’s you,” he said softly. “Georgia never had a gauge, or-or an anchor, or a paddle, or a port, or…”

When he glanced over again after another bit of silence, he saw Hannibal smiling gently at him, sketchbook still splayed open in his hand. Will glanced at it and saw an intricate drawing of his own profile, detailed down to every curl of his hair. Hannibal had created a stylized background of tropical flowers that seemed to crown him, his artistic skill somehow creating the sense that the petals radiated light. His eyes looked large and elegantly shaped, ringed with thick lashes, the shape of his face something balanced and indescribably pleasing, lips full and slightly curved upward at the corner.

Will made an expression that was half a bashful smile, half a wry grimace. “I don’t look like that.”

Hannibal looked him in the eye, dark irises catching the reflection of the sun that streamed in overhead, cut through by the palm fronds. “I have a photographic memory that allows me to reproduce what I see with a high degree of accuracy.”

“Well, that’s not what I look like.” Gone were the deep shadows of exhaustion under his eyes, the sickly hollows of his cheeks replaced by shapely contours. Will had never liked the sharp angles of his face. When he was young, other boys said he looked pretty, like a girl. Later on, he’d thought himself somewhat weasel-faced, and always too thin. His mental image of himself was a far cry from what Hannibal had produced on the sketchbook page, and it was more than a little disconcerting. Decentering.

“This is what I see when I look at you.” Hannibal didn’t explain further, just put the sketchbook and pencil back in his pocket, getting to his feet. He held out a hand and Will took it. Hannibal didn’t let go, linking their fingers together loosely as they left the Palm House and walked a short way to a new building that was half glass and half brick, such a recent construction that the ground still overturned around the foundation. The sign over the door read “Douglas Wilson Memorial Butterfly Garden.”

“Douglas Wilson… the trombonist?”

“The one Tobias Budge murdered, yes,” Hannibal replied, letting go of Will’s hand to open the door for him. “He was a favorite patron of the conservatory, and an amateur entomologist.”

“I’m not one for brass instruments, but… maybe we could have bonded over bugs,” Will said. “That’s, ah… sad, isn’t it.”

The butterfly garden was just as warm and inviting as the Palm House had been. The inside was full of colorful flowers and other plants that butterflies native to the region utilized for food or building their chrysalises. As they passed through a slatted plastic curtain, Will found himself suddenly surrounded by butterflies startled into flight by their approach. He couldn’t suppress a sudden laugh, a moment of pure delight.

They sank onto another bench to watch the insects settle back into their routines, once in a while traversing the garden, alighting on flowers. Diana Fritillary. Gray Hairstreak. Appalachian Tiger Swallowtail. Monarch. Will found himself identifying each species aloud, then stopped.

Hannibal looked at him, brows raised.

“Not tired of me being a… weird insect guy?”

“Why do you think I brought you here?” Hannibal had his sketchbook out and was doing a hasty reproduction of a butterfly that had landed on a branch a few inches from the bench. “And what is this?” He indicated the exquisite dark orange, black, and white creature who watched them as carefully as they watched her, twitching her orange-topped antennae.

“Female Baltimore checkerspot,” Will said, watching her fan her wings. “She came out of the chrysalis recently. You can tell by the sheen on the wings.”

“Butterflies are a time-worn metaphor,” Hannibal said as he shaded in his sketch. “But effective nevertheless. Change can only come in a place where all the necessary elements are present. Build a cocoon only to destroy it by breaking free.”

“Caterpillars *liquefy*.” Will couldn’t help but think of his dreams where he became a being made of water before spilling away to nothingness. “People don’t realize that it’s not just a matter of, ah… taking a rest and waking up with wings.”

“Such an unmaking requires a deep and boundless trust.” Hannibal watched, a gentle smile on his face as a Diana landed on Will’s chest, resting for a few moments on one of his jacket buttons. A monarch joined her, landing directly on the back of Will’s hand where it cupped the end of the bench’s armrest. “A belief in nature to re-solidify what it has dissolved. Relinquishing control and letting the change come.” Hannibal flipped to a new page of his sketchbook and recreated Will’s hand with the butterfly on it in a few seemingly effortless strokes. “Pain is the harbinger of change. But imagine waking up so beautiful, and with the ability to fly after a lifetime of crawling through the dirt.”

“Who doesn’t wish they could just-just go to sleep and… wake up *different* .”

Will’s voice must have startled the butterflies, because they left him, disappearing into the cultivated foliage.

They enjoyed a long silence, broken only by Hannibal’s sketching. After a time, he turned the sketchbook Will’s direction. “I suppose you’re going to tell me this isn’t your hand.”

“No, you got it right this time.” Hannibal had captured it perfectly, down to the scars on his knuckles, the marred skin a strangely marvelous contrast to the butterfly’s effortless beauty.

This clearly pleased Hannibal, his expression easy to read as he tucked the book away again and stood up. Will followed, and they left the butterfly house and the conservatory grounds in no real hurry.

The Bentley was now no longer the only vehicle in the parking area. A delivery truck was backed up to the path and several workers were unloading carefully wrapped statues. One stone angel sat in its place on the grounds already, though surrounded by dead flowerbeds. Hannibal veered that direction to take a look and Will kept up with him.

The statue’s wings were not feathers, but made to look leathery, like a bat’s. The angel’s figure was startlingly realistic but also idealized, masculine and sensual, one arm curved up to grasp at his wavy hair. He was bound to the rock by a chain around the ankle, and in his other hand he held a broken scepter and crown. An apple lay at his feet, and a single tear was somehow etched into the material of his face, sliding toward a beautifully shaped mouth.

“ *La Genie du Mal,* ” Hannibal said in mild surprise. “ *The Genius of Evil* . Daphne made an interesting choice.”

“Lucifer.” Will stepped forward to study the sculpture more closely.

“A skillful reproduction,” Hannibal commented. “The original sits in St. Paul’s cathedral in Liege. If you can believe it, this version replaced another statue of Lucifer that was deemed too physically appealing.”

“It was sexier than this?” Will was incredulous for a moment before feeling crushed by embarrassment at his outburst.

“Lucifer is described in Ezekiel as the most beautiful angel of all,” Hannibal said. Will was keenly aware that Hannibal was looking at him, not the artwork. He kept his eyes on the statue, which was, he had to admit, pretty fucking sexy. Not exactly an effective piece of church propaganda.

“Say what you will about Hell,” Will began, just to have something to say, feeling a glimmer of sweat gather at his hairline. “At least it isn’t lonely. Plenty of people who… understand what you’re going through.” He let out something like a laugh, but it came out in a silent exhalation.

Hannibal’s smile, on the other hand, widened considerably. “When Lucifer fell, he fell with his comrades. He was never alone. Those who allied with him knew his wickedness inside and out, and still stood at his side.”

Will turned, against his better judgment, and looked into Hannibal’s eyes, a long, insistent gaze. Hannibal raised his hand and brushed Will’s hair from his forehead, making only the tiniest connection of skin to skin. Still, it felt like fire and burned like a halo.

Hannibal turned and walked further into the outdoor garden, despite its withered appearance. Will fell into step beside him. They neared a wooden structure that was likely a sitting place, but was much more than a simple bench. It was surrounded on all sides but one with a wooden frame overgrown thickly with vines. They were dead, creating a brown-green curtain that hung over the open side of the structure that would mostly obscure whoever was inside.

Hannibal parted the vines and stepped through, holding them aside for Will. There was a bench inside, as he’d thought, made of the same carved wood.

“Sit with me.” Hannibal’s words were light, like a request, but there existed beneath them an undercurrent of command. Will lowered himself onto the wooden bench, keenly aware of the doctor’s outstretched arm and the hand that rested just behind his head.

“I—“ he began awkwardly. “Uh, another sketch, or…”

“Would you like me to draw you again?” Hannibal asked, softly playful. The hand slung over the back of the bench crept forward until its fingertips rested on the back of Will’s neck, lightly teasing the curls that gathered there. “I’d love to have you sit for me. A longer session.”

“I don’t, uhm...” Will could barely form the words, so intent was he focused on the feeling of those fingers brushing his skin.

“I’m afraid I wasn’t entirely honest with you today, Will,” Hannibal confessed with a short sigh of remorse. “I canceled my afternoon appointments myself.”

“Why?” Will thought he might know the answer, but didn’t want to get ahead of himself.

“Today I watched you smile through a broken heart,” Hannibal said quietly, abandoning the back of his neck to hold Will’s hand instead, clasping it over his own thigh, his grip smooth and warm. “I came back because I couldn’t stop thinking about it.”

The hallucinations, the loss of time, sleepwalking – could all of that have just been the fever?

Fevers can be a symptom of dementia. Dementia can be a symptom of many things in your body or mind that can no longer be ignored, Will.

“Nothing more isolating than mental illness,” Will repeated dully.

“I wish I could heal you,” Hannibal told him, liquid-amber eyes shining with sudden emotion. “To protect you from Jack, from your own mind – but I can’t help feeling that this battle is your crucible, Will.”

“If you help a butterfly break out of a chrysalis, it won’t be strong enough to fly,” Will said.

Hannibal nodded.

“Y’know what I wish?”

“Tell me,” Hannibal said.

“I wish that what we have… wouldn’t be a secret anymore.” Will felt a gash open up inside of him, worse than any physical wound. He blinked in disbelief that he’d even given voice to such an idea.

The silence that followed was thick with everything unsaid — their vastly different stations in life, their positions in relation to the FBI’s needs, Jack Crawford, the necessity of secrecy, their professional careers and reputations, the undefinable nature of their relationship. Will could do nothing but focus his eyes on their entwined hands, feeling the weight of Hannibal’s palm pressing his down with nearly desperate force.

“I would like to kiss you, Will,” Hannibal requested, loosening his grip on Will’s hand. “If you would permit me.”

“Always. I will. I mean, I do. I mean…” The words tumbled out of his mouth unbidden. Hannibal smiled and leaned in, putting a gentle hand on Will’s shoulder, his touch burning through the thick fabric of the jacket. Slowly, he slid his arm around, pulling Will closer. There was no resisting it. Within moments Will was pressed against him, half in his lap, Hannibal’s arm around him, the other hand running up from his knee, higher.

They held one another’s rapt gazes until their mouths found their way together. The kiss was firm but closed-mouthed, lasting a prolonged moment where Will’s mind went completely blank, his world of darkness and Hannibal and the faint birdsong he could hear over the steady thrumming of his heart.

Hannibal ended the press of lips and began another, this one more insistent. Will kept up with him, encouraged to express his own hunger, his hands finding Hannibal’s chest, maddeningly out of reach beneath his clothing, and the side of his warm, fragrant neck.

Hannibal pulled back to look at him. “I don’t think I slept more than an hour the night you went to the hospital.”

“I know you came to sit by me,” Will confided, sliding his fingers into Hannibal’s hair on the back of his neck. “I could… I could h-hear you talking to me. I felt it when you held my hand.”

Another desperate kiss. “I would have held it all night,” Hannibal breathed into his ear, then moved his lips down to what seemed to be his favored place — Will’s throat down to the curve of his shoulder. “I was asked to leave when visiting hours ended. So many times they threatened to call security.”

Will smiled into their next kiss. “You were rude for me. That’s a surprise.”

“I’m constantly surprised at the things I would do for you, Will.”

Just then, they both heard it — the sound of feet crunching on the dry grass, coming closer. They released each other immediately and slid further away on the bench. It was Daphne, and one of the workmen, the former chattering away instructions for statue placement.

Will sighed. “Probably should get back, huh?”

“I told the hospital it was a brief excursion, yes.” They stood up, and Hannibal parted the vines for him again. Will’s nerves were strings of embers winding his body, lancing him everywhere with a steady threaded burn. He ran through several scenarios in his head, but gave up, frustrated, as they got in the car and pulled out into traffic.

After five minutes or so, however, hope renewed, and his blood felt on the cusp of boiling. “This isn’t the way back to the hospital,” he said softly, raising one eyebrow.

“No, it isn’t.” Hannibal’s admission as simple, matter-of-fact. Will shut his mouth and waited, chained by his hope and shifting his body at the increase in his desire. Yeah, he was definitely feeling better, almost maddeningly so. His mind felt clear, wheels turning furiously. He could work, he realized, teach anyway, with ease. Functionality only enhanced his current discomfort, sharpened the ache of wanting.

It wasn’t long before Will figured out where Hannibal must be headed, and was not surprised when the Bentley pulled up in front of Hannibal’s house. Hannibal paused with his hand on the car door latch. “You’re not tired? Should I take you back?”

“N-no.”

“Shall we go in?”

Will nodded without speaking, hoping to contain himself until they were inside.

Hannibal’s bedroom, less than two minutes later, their overcoats left haphazardly on the sofa downstairs.

“In this moment I lack the ability to act in your best interest, Will,” Hannibal said, his words still softly neutral even as Will stepped out of his shoes and moved his hand deftly down Hannibal’s lapel before bringing his fingers together to tease apart the buttons of his vest.

“I’m fine,” Will said as he slid the doctor out of his suit jacket and vest with deliberate patience, the delay in pleasure nearly as exciting as the act itself. “I was going crazy stuck in that hospital room.”

“Poor choice of words,” Hannibal told him. Will was pleased to see a sheen of sweat appear on his forehead as he knelt before Hannibal, working at his belt. Hannibal took one of Will’s hands gently, and Will let go of the buckle, rising slowly to his feet. Hannibal stepped back toward the carefully made bed, the lines of linen so crisp it might have been a furniture sale ad, and sank onto it, guiding Will closer by the hand he still had in his own. Will put a hand on either side of his shoulders and slung a leg over, bending in to kiss him again, lightly at first, then with more pressure.

Hannibal pulled away to look at him, one hand on his back, the other in his hair, cupping the back of his head. “You’re in a hurry,” he observed, tilting his chin slightly. “The nurses are probably wondering where you are.”

“They’re probably *already* wondering,” Will admitted.

“So the damage is done.”

Will smiled down at him with a rueful shake of his head. “No reason to hurry, then.”

“Many wish to savor the things they enjoy,” Hannibal noted, shifting up slowly and rolling them over to settle himself between Will’s thighs, spreading over his body to put his lips against Will’s ear. “In my experience,” he added, words as tangible air against the side of Will’s face.

He drew Will’s earlobe into his mouth briefly, then moved his lips along the slope of the throat to Will’s shirt collar before bringing them back again. Will made a small sound of pleasure and slid his hands down to tease Hannibal’s shirt out of his waistband, pushing it up to feel the warm expanse of his back, the delightful imperfections of human skin like a Braille he could read of the years of this man’s life.

Hannibal eased back to begin unbuttoning his shirt, to finish what Will started, taking his time with each pearlescent disc, while Will opted to pull his garment directly over his head and toss it off the bed. He started from the bottom of the shirt and met Hannibal’s hands in the middle, grasping at them impatiently, despite their earlier exchange, trying to pull them closer together. Hannibal eased back again, causing Will to sit up, trying to follow.

“You have the haste of youth now, for this,” Hannibal told him as Will leaned in again. “But not in your thoughts. You experience yourself and the world very deliberately when you choose to.”

It caught Will off guard and he paused, trying to discern something in Hannibal’s cool gray gaze. “People say things like I have an old soul,” he said. “Whatever that means.”

“Age brings insight, and a certain world-weariness. You’ve developed it very early. This can indicate trauma in childhood.”

“Are we in session?” Will inquired, not without the heat of frustration that he felt in his body as well, in one specific place to be sure. “You want to hear more about my mother or something?”

“We were never in session. You’re not my patient.”

“Prove it.”

Hannibal smiled briefly and put his hand on the back of Will’s head again, leaning in to kiss him softly, then with more force. Will broke off, taking him by the lapel and pulling him to the edge of the bed, kneeling on the floor before him and returning to the abandoned belt buckle.

“Will.” Hannibal paused Will’s hands, taking them in his own. “A moment, please. I hope you’ll indulge me.”

“Indulge you how?” Will watched him get up and go to the bathroom. The sound of rushing water suddenly filled the space. Will got up with a little huff of frustration and went to the doorway.

Hannibal was filling the huge taupe stone soaking tub with water, pausing to pour in some kind of golden oil.

“Take your clothes off.”

Will hesitated, leaning on the door frame, looking at the floor. “I, uh, smell like the hospital, don’t I.”

“Their facilities are less than desirable. I thought you might enjoy this more. Please.” He tested the water with his fingers, then stood up and motioned to the filling tub. Will thought about the tiny shower in the bathroom adjacent to his hospital room, and the threadbare towels provided. They were so small and scratchy Will remembered the gym towels in junior high being in better shape.

When he didn’t answer, didn’t move, Hannibal came to him, sliding his jeans and underwear down and peeling off his socks. Will caught Hannibal looking at him, taking advantage of an uninterrupted moment to drink him in.

Hannibal saw that he’d noticed and smiled, closed-lipped, shy almost, before standing back to let Will into the perfumed tub. Will lowered himself down with an audible sigh of sudden contentment. Hannibal moved the bathroom’s chair closer and positioned it toward the foot of the tub, rolling up his shirtsleeves. Will let his eyes close, head back, and he sighed again as Hannibal put his arm in the water, sliding it down from his knee to his foot. When his fingers closed around it, Will gave a little jump. “You better not be trying to tickle me,” he warned.

Hannibal laughed. It was short, but sweetly unguarded. “No, that is not my intention.” He lifted Will’s foot out of the bath, and rubbed it with his strong, sure fingers.

“Mmm.” Will closed his eyes again and angled his head back. “That feels… incredible — you can push harder—” He made a sound of pleasure in his throat that was relatively identical to some Hannibal had heard him make in other, more intimate situations. “That’s a good spot right there…”

Hannibal waited until Will switched feet on him and gave the other a similar treatment. “I can’t tell you the last time someone gave me a foot rub,” Will told him. “Maybe never.”

“When was the last time you gave one?”

Will opened his eyes and fixed him with a playful gaze. “Are you asking?”

Hannibal half-smiled. “No. I was only curious.”

Will wrinkled his brow, glancing up at the painted ceiling, this area depicting sea nymphs and sailors. “There was a girl I went out with a few times in undergrad.” He paused. “You?”

“This is my first time.”

Will scoffed as Hannibal worked his fingers in between his toes. “No it isn’t. No way you’re this good at it on your first try.”

“Some are born with natural talent.”

“You read about it, didn’t you?” Will asked through a knowing smirk, his expression melting into one of pleasure as Hannibal worked his thumb along the arch of his foot. “ *Erotic Foot Massage for Beginners* or something?”

“Erotic was not in the title. Do you find this erotic?” Hannibal asked him evenly, though Will sensed a sudden thrill trickle through him, changing the shade of his lips just slightly.

“Yes,” Will admitted, “though don’t count on it working every time. I have to keep you on your toes.”

“On *your* toes,” Hannibal corrected and was rewarded with a laugh that echoed through the sand-tiled chamber, bringing its walls an added element of life. He leaned down and kissed each digit in turn, then eased Will’s foot back into the water.

“You should get in,” Will advised, rising at the waist to let a little water out. Hannibal obliged after hanging up his clothing carefully and switching on some music. He folded Will back against him, one hand drawing his hair back across his head in an endless soothing rhythm, the other against his thigh with Will’s clasped over it.

“Did you enjoy the conservatory?” Hannibal asked after a time of contented silence where the only sound was the occasional drip of water and the rumble of Vivaldi.

Will angled his head back to look at him. “I had — it was a really good day,” he said. Hannibal bent his neck to kiss him, a gentle brush, before Will settled back again. “Wish I didn’t have to go back to the hospital.” He sighed, watching tendrils of steam float up from the bath’s surface. “Can’t you get me out of there?”

“It’s best that you remain under medical observation,” Hannibal countered, drawing his hand slowly down Will’s throat in a long caress against the warm, wet flesh.

“But you’re a doctor.” Will drew Hannibal’s hand over his stomach for a moment. “And I don’t like the food. I could use some of your cooking.”

“Flattery will get you nowhere,” Hannibal told him, enjoying another slow caress of his throat, a throat he had not touched for days and days, since the night they’d spent together when Will had seen the thicket of antlers. It felt like a lifetime ago. “Are you purposely appealing to all of my weaknesses?”

Will shook his head against Hannibal’s collarbone. “I was just — trying to make a good case for staying.”

“But in that deceptively innocent way you have,” Hannibal said softly against his ear, moving his damp fingertips against Will’s cheekbone before visiting his neck again, feeling the pulse beneath his fingertips.

“So it worked?” Will asked, as if it was as simple as that. Hopefully it was.

Hannibal laughed silently, then guided Will’s chin back to kiss him again, softly at first, but ending with sweet firmness. “I am loath to deny you anything.”

“So I can stay?” Will kept his head turned to look up into Hannibal’s eyes, finding them earnest, glimmering in the soft light of the room.

Hannibal traced the back of his fingers down Will’s cheek. “I couldn’t keep you in good conscience. As much as I would welcome it. My bed has begun to feel much too big when you aren’t in it.”

The words caused an unguarded expression of happiness to replace the quiet uncertainty on Will's features. He settled back into Hannibal's arms, pulling them closer around his body. "I, uhm, I sleep… *better* here."

Hannibal responded by kissing his neck, beginning just below the ear and slowly working his way down the slope to the beginning rise of his shoulder muscle, simultaneously drawing his fingertips along Will's collarbone in slow, erotic strokes. Will made a soft sound of assent, touching Hannibal's thigh with languid caresses of his own. Hannibal's hand moved down his chest at a tantalizingly slow pace, lingering briefly over his nipple, then navel, then lower. Will arched his back against Hannibal's chest for a moment with a supplicating sigh before settling back again as Hannibal touched him, slowly at first, then with more intention. Will lifted one arm out of the water and reached behind to put his fingers in Hannibal's hair as he bent over Will's neck once more, worshiping its warm, smooth surface and the beating veins beneath.

Will's breath caught in the final moment of anticipation before Hannibal put teeth against flesh, a precise bite that could have been almost painless, if that had been what Will wanted. Which it wasn't. Hannibal turned his mouth just slightly to twist the bite, sucking on the skin just as Will's passion peaked. He snarled his fingers against the side of the tub and Hannibal's thigh, body quivering with his release.

Slowly, Will's grip on the side of the tub relaxed, then slipped free, his arm sliding back into the water. So many days without any kind of intimate touch had been torture — and he had not realized the extent of his suffering until this moment of final gratification.

Will's breathing was shallow, labored, cheeks hot with the rosiness of the bath. He kept his eyes closed, as Hannibal lifted cupped handfuls of perfumed water, cascading it gently over the troubled skin of the mark he'd left where Will's shoulder eased into his neck.

"You knew you were going to bring me back here," Will murmured, his voice dreamy, far away from his ears. "You came back to get me for this— not, uh, a trip to some garden."

"When something is forbidden, it increases desire." Hannibal moved Will gently to get out of the bath, toweled off, then helped Will do the same. Will felt half asleep, his limbs entirely pliable, exhausted from Hannibal's treatment. He made no objection when Hannibal led him the final steps to the bed, tucking him beneath the sheets to fight the chill.

Hannibal climbed in next to him, then eased his way over Will as he settled onto the pillows, parting his knees to rest between them. Will stretched his arms over his head and absently ran a hand along the pillow. Hannibal crawled up and kissed him, first on the mouth, then gently over the bruise on his neck. "You're so warm," Will murmured, absently touching Hannibal's damp hair, winding it behind his ear before dropping his arm again.

"I've exhausted you," Hannibal said, though it wasn't an apology. He traced his fingers down Will's chest, lingering them over his abdominals. "It seems you're still weak from your fever."

Will half-smiled, his eyes closed. "Too weak to fight you, that's for sure," he whispered.

Hannibal took that as an invitation, supporting himself on one hand while using the other to trace his opening, still damp from the bath and slick with the oils. Will exhaled and bit his lip as he worked one finger in, then two. "Don't bite your lip," Hannibal warned him in between the kisses he built from the side of Will's knee along the tender flesh of his inner thigh.

Hannibal moved in, and found Will relaxed and ready to receive him. He began slowly, seeming to hold himself back. In an attempt to keep his movements to a minimum, Hannibal spread himself over Will's damp body, cradling him with a kind of forced gentleness, burying his face in the slope of his neck and shoulder or kissing him in long, slow intervals.

When he pulled back and looked down at Will, a loving smile if he'd ever seen one, Will's hand stole out to push his hair away from his forehead. Hannibal immediately lost his carefully curated control, grasping Will by the hip and the wrist and thrusting recklessly until he finished, squeezing Will's arm until he made a small but significant sound of pain.

Hannibal collapsed on him, breathing heavily, and remained there for a few moments until he seemed to find the sense to slide off of Will and gather him in his arms. Will let himself revel in placid darkness, feeling only Hannibal's body against him, holding him with a mixture of complete gentleness and a kind of possessive grapple, the sensation somehow directly between the two. He scented the comforting smell of Hannibal's bed, the musky amber of the bath oil, and the two of their bodies mingling after sex.

He let his mind wander, which turned out to be a dangerous thing. Will heard a floorboard creak in the hallway and opened his eyes. Facing the door where he lay, he could see a shadow just peeking in the frame, a human shape, nothing more than an ear, an eye, and part of a head, with fingers curled over the edge of the frame. For a long moment, Will was able to fool himself that it was just a shadow. It reminded him of being a kid and getting spooked by a housecoat hanging on the back of the door that looked, in the dark of his bedroom, like a hooded phantom. *Not real,* he thought.

The shadow seemed to coalesce and sharpen, gaining form and structure. The eye was clouded and blue, the skin grayish white, the head bald with a few tufts of bristly hair just above the ear.

Garret Jacob Hobbs.

Will turned immediately and looked at Hannibal instead. Hannibal ran a hand through Will's hair, curling it behind his ear, then furrowed his brow the tiniest bit. He pressed his hand against Will's forehead, palm down, then the back, then palm down again. "I think your fever's back," he said.

"No," Will insisted, wrapping an arm under Hannibal's, tracing his fingers along the ridges of his spine. "I'm just warm from the bath. And you."

"You're due for medication. Overdue, probably." Hannibal craned up his head to check his watch. "I was supposed to return you over an hour ago."

"So what?" Will knew he sounded desperate, but he didn't care. He *was* desperate. "You're a doctor, can't you give it to me?"

"Will, I'm not privy to your medical records. I don't know what you're taking or how much. Getting the information would take time, not to mention raise an eyebrow or two."

Hannibal tried to slide out of Will's grasp, but he caught on and refused to relinquish his hold. "I don't want…" Will tried, then sighed, defeated. He relaxed his grip.

Hannibal sat up on one elbow and bent over to kiss him, first on the forehead, then on the mouth. "Sometimes we must forego what the heart desires when it impedes what's best for us."

Hannibal went quiet, rolling onto his back, seeming, Will sensed, to consider the meaning of his own words. “Or best for others,” he added after a short, tense silence.

“Bullshit,” Will muttered, sitting up to get out of bed. As he stood to find his clothes, he deliberately did not look at Garret Jacob Hobbs peeking through the doorway, or at the raven-feathered stag that lurked in the corner of the bedroom.

Twenty minutes later, Hannibal pulled up to the front of the hospital, easing the Bentley to a stop a few steps from the glistening automatic doors. He put a hand on Will’s where it rested on his thigh. “Goodnight.”

“‘Night,” Will said with a curt nod. He put his hand on the door handle.

“Will?”

He paused, and looked back at Hannibal’s face, taking in his earnest expression.

“Don’t talk to that girl again,” Hannibal advised. “After more thought, I don’t think it advisable for your recovery.”

Will got out and shut the door, then turned to watch Hannibal drive away into the day’s growing shadows.

… and CUT!

Now, start the episode again. That night, someone leaves a plastic comb in Georgia Madchen’s oxygen pod. She uses it on her hair, which creates a spark that ignites the pure oxygen in her tube. She burns alive (big yikes). Will doesn’t believe she committed suicide. His time at the hospital has brought back some of his mental clarity as the medications are able to break the fever, though the doctors don’t detect the encephalitis. Will starts connecting dots, and poses a theory that whoever killed Cassie Boyle, and Marissa Schuur also killed Dr. Sutcliffe and Georgia Madchen. Turns out Hannibal’s in a bit of trouble!

… stay tuned!

Season 1 Episode 13: Savoureux

Chapter Summary

Hannibal comes to Will's house to frame him for murder, and admits he cares about Will. But it's time to say goodbye.

Chapter Notes

Companion Song: “Heart Heart Head” – Meg Meyers

You're in my heart
In my heart, in my head
You're in my heart
In my heart, in my head
Pressure on my lips
I'd die for just one kiss
Wait, God, can't resist
Could I be dreaming this?

At the end of Episode 12, Will realizes he’s returned to Virginia without Abigail, having lost time as a result of having an “episode” at the Hobbs cabin. Somehow, in his fugue state, slipping in and out of reality, he makes it back to his house and goes to bed. This scene happens that night, and is woven in with Will’s dream about pursuing the stag through the woods and shooting at an anthropomorphic version of it that resembles Hannibal. He wounds it, and follows its blood trail.

The light wormed its way beneath Will’s eyelids. Raising a hand to his face, he rolled over in bed with a soft moan. He was soaked in sweat and his head throbbed, his vision intermittently doubling, scrolling upward like a VCR with bad tracking. He sat up slowly, blinking, eyes catching sight of a backlit shadow seated at his desk. It was a human figure, sitting in his chair, peering through the magnifying glass attached to the brass stand, winding string around a fishing lure.

Will’s eyes wouldn’t focus. The headache asphyxiated his senses. Somewhere, he heard the dogs moving, every now and then emitting a melancholy whine. He didn’t need his eyes, however, to know that Hannibal was in the room. He knew that cologne anywhere.

Will scrubbed at his brow and let out a muted groan of anguish. Hannibal turned in his seat and glanced at him, then looked back at his work. To Will’s surprise, Hannibal wasn’t wearing his usual suit, or even an oxford, instead dressed in a simple tight-fitting black sweater and durable-looking black pants with a pair of outdoorsy boots. It was such a departure from his usual attire that Will was half-convinced this was some kind of hallucination.

Putting the finishing touches on the fishing fly, Hannibal switched off the light, for which Will was extraordinarily grateful. He sat down on the edge of Will's bed. Will reached for him instinctively and Hannibal pulled him into an embrace. "Will," he said softly, a lilt of sadness in his voice. Will relaxed against his body and leaned into Hannibal's hand as he passed it across Will's damp brow.

"What– what time is it?"

"It's late," Hannibal said.

Will felt panic rise like bile against the back of his throat, searing and bitter. "It's happening again," he whispered hoarsely against Hannibal's shoulder. "It's happening again and I can't– I can't think– I'm seeing things…"

"What's the last thing you remember?" Hannibal cupped the back of his head, twining his fingers gently into Will's sweaty hair.

"I-I was at th-the airport," Will stuttered as Hannibal pulled back gently to kiss his forehead. "And I lost Abigail – I-I took her to the cabin and I lost her, and then I was on the plane, and now I'm here and I don't – I don't remember, I don't r-remember–"

"Will." Hannibal's utterance of his name was calming, grounded, stabilizing. "You're clutching for balance. You know what to do to find it again."

He did.

Will dragged Hannibal to him by the collar of his sweater and found his lips in the dark, kissing him with a fever-bright desperation. Hannibal bent him back to lay on his thin, cheap pillow, alternately stroking and pulling at his hair. Will wound a hand behind Hannibal's neck and Hannibal grabbed his other wrist, shoving it down against the bed while simultaneously working a knee between his legs. Will ground himself desperately against Hannibal's thigh, the red-black behind his eyes a comforting nothingness, giving in purely to the sensation.

Hannibal curved his hand around Will's and dug his fingernails into the tender skin of the back of his hand, leaving long scratches that braided with the pleasure and desire that wove through Will's body. His mind was a blank horizon illuminated intermittently by heat lightning, low and throbbing and indistinct. Hannibal's mouth left Will's and climbed down his throat in a tempest of kisses, sucking, licking, soft bites, as if he was seconds away from tearing into Will's flesh like an animal. He plucked Will's hand from the back of his neck and forced it back against the bed as well before scoring Will's forearm with his nails, long contrails of fire running from the crook of Will's elbow to his wrist.

And then Hannibal let him go, sitting back on his heels. Will's sight swam back into focus and he lay, limp and still sweating, beneath Hannibal, who had him pinned down by the hips. The scratches on his hands and arms sang with stinging anguish, but it was nothing compared to the straining force of his arousal that ached for Hannibal's touch.

Hannibal's expression was momentarily featureless and cold, his dark eyes vast and glassy and dead, a fish's eyes, shark like. He tensed and shifted as if he was going to climb off of Will, abandon him, but suddenly stopped, going so still that Will feared he was nothing but an afterimage in his brain, existing like the ghost of a camera flash still stained across his vision.

And then the cold gloss, the sheen of ice cracked, crumbled, melted. Hannibal's eyes returned to life and were suddenly shining with tears. He slowly lowered himself over Will again and kissed him, breaths halting and laden with emotion. All he could seem to say was his name. "Will."

"What's— why are you—"

Hannibal put his fingers over Will's lips and hushed his questions. A tear dropped from the corner of his eye, catching the small light of the tender moon outside. "At first I denied that I could feel this way. Once accepted, it had to be ignored. I knew it was selfish, and it was standing in the way of your becoming. Now, it must step aside in order for me to save myself. And I hate it, Will. A thousand times, I've wished things were different. But once your mind began to see the connections, there was no stopping you."

The stag walked silently behind Hannibal, stalking at the end of the bed before melting into the shadows near the fireplace, its feathers ruffling in a silent breeze. As Will tracked it, he caught sight of Garret Jacob Hobbs lurking on the front porch, peering through a window at them, a leering voyeur.

"It's Hobbs," Will managed through rapidly rising breaths, gripping Hannibal's thighs, unbelievably grateful for his presence and his anchoring weight. He knew Hannibal had been saying something, but processing it made his head throb even more insistently. "I don't want to see him. H-he's dead but he won't- he won't leave."

Hannibal's tears slid down to his chin and dripped onto Will's shirt as Hannibal leaned in to kiss him again. Will closed his eyes and clung to the sensation, the taste, praying Hobbs would be gone when he opened his eyes.

Hannibal broke the kiss and ran his fingers along the waistband of Will's underwear before he stripped them off in a flourish, tossing them carelessly to the floor. He brought his lips to Will's throat again, touching one nipple gently through his sweaty tee-shirt, then with more force as Will responded beneath him, caressing Hannibal's back, running his fingers through his hair, grasping at him with desperate ardor.

Hannibal pushed Will's shirt up to his neck, trailed his lips down along Will's chest, then lower. Will realized what was happening in a sudden moment of relief as Hannibal expertly lifted him and opened his mouth. Will let out a breathy sigh as Hannibal's tongue slid over him, though it was probing, tentative, just a taste.

Will's breath caught, burned his lungs, as a deeply unnerving sensation of other-worldliness clamped down on his heart and mind. As he watched, two bloody antlers shoved through the flesh of his chest and rose upward. Blood gushed out in silent streams of black gore, running down his body and soaking the bed beneath him.

"Will."

He closed his eyes against the horror and focused his throbbing mind on the sensation of Hannibal's hand on him, honing in only on the act, the trust, the desire. "Keep going," Will managed, his request a breathless plea as Hannibal stroked him, using his mouth intermittently as he explored, responding immediately to Will's cues.

Will dared to open his eyes. The antlers were gone and his skin was unscathed. The disbelief and pleasure raked through him. Was this really happening, or was it just another piece of his shattered

mind, imagining Hannibal doing this just to keep him from falling completely off the deep end? It was almost too much to bear. He was half-inclined to ask Hannibal to stop. It was overwhelming, the culmination of terror, desire, and he knew it now— love.

Hannibal — flesh and blood or merely a specter — kept edging him closer and then changing something, speed or touch, and he drifted away from climax again. It was excruciating.

“Hold me,” he pleaded at last. “Like you did the night I came home and you were here.”

Hannibal obliged immediately. He swiftly undressed, then turned Will over and pressed his hips into Will’s backside, stimulating him in front, running his length along where Will’s thigh ended and his ass curved up.

The sensation of Hannibal falling over his neck and shoulders was deeply sensual, and he felt himself enveloped by the warm, broad expanse of Hannibal’s body. He came at last, and the power of it, built up over time, made his entire body shake, though Hannibal anchored him in a tight embrace.

Good thing, too. Because the bed had become a mushroom garden, and a rotted hand plunged out of the loam, gripping Will’s arm in a desperate display of life. Will closed his eyes again and brought his mind to the sensation of Hannibal holding him. A few moments later, as he struggled to breathe, Hannibal’s grip around his midsection tightened again. Will felt warmth against the inside of his inner thigh when Hannibal spent.

Will opened his eyes. The bed was a bed again.

Hannibal turned him on his back and settled over him, breathing hard, resting his head on Will’s chest, torso between his knees, the weight a warm comfort. Will stroked his hair, eyes closed, relishing the feeling, so safe and familiar now. At last, Hannibal crawled up his body again to kiss Will gently as Will stroked his back with both hands.

Out of the corner of his eye, he saw Georgia Madchen, as she’d looked in the horrific grip of Cotard’s Syndrome. He started, his mouth falling away from Hannibal’s. Hannibal took Will’s jaw in his hand and demanded the kiss return. Will blinked and Georgia was dead now, a charred skeleton, no eyes yet somehow looking at him. Sadly, he thought, as if despite her condition, she was worried about *him* .

After a time, Hannibal released his mouth and simply looked at him, fingers drawing through Will’s tangled hair. There was something so soft and vulnerable in Hannibal’s eyes that Will almost wanted to look away. Something was coming. He wasn’t sure what it was.

“Will,” Hannibal murmured. He took a breath, tongue stealing out to moisten his lower lip. “I shouldn’t say this, not now. Words wasted on a crumbling memory.”

“Hannibal–”

“I care for you, in a way I have to admit is more powerful than any I’ve ever experienced.” The words came out in a tumbling rush, quiet but forceful. Before Will could reply, make any response, Hannibal crushed their mouths together for several long moments. It was perfect, sweet, and gave Will a second to try and think.

When Hannibal pulled away, he said, “You don’t have to say anything. It’s better, I think, if you don’t.”

Will felt tears climbing up his throat. “Why does this f-feel like… like a *goodbye* ?”

Hannibal didn’t respond, just kissed him again, pressing him hard into the bed, the hand in his hair pulling gently now, then with more force. Will could feel Hannibal’s lips curling down as he fought tears of his own.

After breaking it off, Hannibal pulled him close, folding Will against himself, chest spread along Will’s back in a long, uninterrupted span of skin-against-skin. He curled his hand around Will’s chest and placed it over his heart, holding him tightly, desperately.

Will relaxed against him, the previous moment of anguish melting away, the memory soaked up by the fever. There was only *right now* . He was aware of being home, safe in his little house, in Hannibal’s arms, listening to him breathe, to the intermittent snuffles or soft whines from the dogs in their own beds. They seemed content, unconcerned, as if they could sense that their master was in the arms of someone who would keep them all safe, even as Will steadily lost his mind. Hannibal was here. It would be all right. Will couldn’t remember how he’d arrived, or what they’d been saying before, but he knew this post-coital moment, and leaned into it. No future, no past.

He slept, the inner camera of his mind disabled, folding his mind in dark dreamlessness.

When he opened his eyes again, Will saw Hannibal seated on the edge of his bed. His hair was wet and he seemed fresh, like he’d showered, dressed again in the unfamiliar black clothing. Will’s skin, especially around his thighs, felt damp and clean as well, and he realized the sheets had been changed. In the night’s placid quiet, he could hear the dryer running.

Hannibal picked up Will’s hand. Will winced slightly at his touch – for some reason, Hannibal was wearing medical-grade latex gloves. Gently, Hannibal folded down all but two of Will’s fingers. These he dipped into a small plastic cup. There was something cold and viscous inside. Will jerked in response, but Hannibal held on tightly to his hand until he relaxed back into the hold. “Forgive me, I should have warmed it up,” Hannibal said softly. “It’s not like me to forget such details, but this isn’t the first time your presence has distracted me.”

The smell hit Will then, coppery and visceral. Blood.

This wasn’t real. Couldn’t be. Didn’t make sense.

Will’s suspicions were confirmed when he glanced toward the night-black windows and saw the Angel-Maker’s victims kneeling at the foot of his bed, praying over him as Hannibal removed his fingers from the blood and dipped in the second two, then the thumb. After soaking each finger thoroughly, Hannibal set the cup down and patiently wiped off the blood on the surface of the skin with a cloth that he then put in his pants pocket before repeating the process on the other side.

Winston whined. The dogs seemed a little more agitated now, perhaps in response to the smell of blood. Hannibal put a lid on the plastic cup and set it aside, then picked up a package Will hadn’t seen before that had been resting on his desk. Hannibal opened it, the paper crinkling softly, and fed the dogs a treat. They settled back into bed, Max and Buster soon snoring. Only Winston remained alert, obediently on his pillow but coiled as if waiting for something, ears perked up, eyes bright. When Will looked at the flayed-skin angels at the foot of the bed, the man and woman had their

heads turned, gazing lovingly at his pack, smiling the little smiles that people did when they saw cute animals or babies, adoring and benevolent.

Hannibal stroked Winston's head, and pointed to the floor. Winston lowered himself down, resting his muzzle on his paws.

"They like you," Will slurred, his voice fuzzy and far away, dreamlike.

"You trained them well," Hannibal replied, his voice cool and neutral, not looking at Will as he spoke.

The scene before Will's view melted, taking on the softness of dreamscape seen in old movies – a wavy, underwater quality. The world's color bled away and became something like a black and white film. Just like the one that was always on public TV late at night – what was it called? *Carnival of Souls,* that was it. Little Will would crawl out of bed and sneak to the couch to watch it under a blanket, ready to duck beneath the quilt when the ghouls grinned on screen.

The woman in the movie was dead, but she didn't know it. The ghouls were there to try and reach her, to let her know it was time to join them. Shuffle loose the mortal coil. Let it all go and dance, wander the sands.

The pavilion. A soft wind ruffled Will's hair as it blew in from the lake. The weathered boards of the dilapidated structure groaned beneath his feet.

The dead danced, slowly at first, then spinning frantically, throwing their heads back in ecstasy, before winding down again. They moved in time to the dissonant organ music that permeated the scene, sweeping between the solemn notes of a religious hymn and the playful lilt of carnival fare.

Hannibal was the ghoul now, face covered in Vaudevillian greasepaint, hair sprayed white, eyes ringed with charcoal. He held out a hand to Will, a silent invitation. Will didn't hesitate, and Hannibal drew him into his arms, keeping a hold of one of Will's hands. He placed the other on his shoulder before gripping the small of Will's back. They turned effortlessly to the discordant music, the dead swirling around them in funerary finery – Garret Jacob Hobbs and his wife, two corpses covered with mushrooms, Nicholas and Cassie Boyle, Marissa Schuur cutting between Mr. and Mrs. Turner, the latter taking the hand of the Angel-Maker. It warmed Will's heart to see Georgia, a charred skeleton, in the arms of one of the cops Tobias Budge had murdered. And here was Tobias himself, straddling his human cello, playing along with the organ music, weaving his unsound between the notes.

This was where he belonged. This was where they both belonged, in the shadows, in a world of celluloid black and white, dancing among the damned.

Somehow, over the organ music and the unsound of Tobias's horsehair bow dragging over the trombonists's vocal cords, he heard a dog barking.

It was Winston, and he sounded frantic, scared.

"What's wrong?" he murmured to himself as they came to a stop, the other dancers still swirling around them like a river current breaking against a rock that rose from the surface.

Hannibal only smiled and cupped his face for a charnel-house kiss, lips grave-cold.

He woke up.

For a few long moments, he thought the world was still black and white, that somehow his headache was preventing him from seeing color. Pain raked itself over his scalp before burrowing in behind his eyes and at the base of his skull. He groaned miserably and dry-heaved a few times before struggling to his feet.

He was standing ankle-deep in the cold, slimy mud at the edge of the lake on his property. The world had seemed black and white, like the dream, because the night was so dark, the bands of snow that remained after the recent melt glowing through the dim, reflecting the faint light of the crescent moon. Will shivered. He was wearing his underwear and a tee-shirt that was almost completely soaked in cold sweat. Winston was a few feet away, his paws and legs damp, pacing in an agitated state, barking intermittently.

He thought I was going to walk into the water, Will thought. His mind felt as thick and sludgy as the mud he was standing in.

Slowly, he got himself out of the mud and onto drier ground. Leaning over, he scraped some of the mud from his feet, dirtying his hands in the process. Frowning, he raised his hands up to try and catch them in the faint moonlight. His hands and forearms were lined with scratches. *Defensive wounds,* he thought, his forensics training somehow cutting through the thick fog of his mind like a beam of light in a blackout.

Who had he attacked? Who had needed to *defend* themselves against him? His heart seized, capsized, sank. He'd hurt someone. It had finally happened, the inevitable conclusion to his long descent, his voyage further and further away from reality.

Winston barked at him again. Will straightened and watched the dog trot back into the woods, headed up the path for the house. Will stumbled after him, letting his skin be torn by twigs and underbrush. His house was silent, dark, save for a faint light glowing from the kitchen, probably under the exhaust hood above the stove.

The kitchen door was unlocked. Will pushed it open and stumbled inside, his skin desperate for warmth, his bare toes spreading mud on the laminate flooring.

Hannibal sat at the kitchen table, Will's whiskey bottle within arm's reach, a tumbler full of the amber liquid before him. Also on the table was a length of plastic tubing, a clear sample dish with a lump of tissue on it, and a series of syringes. He was wearing some kind of plastic suit over his clothes, with latex gloves on his hands. All this was strange, but Will overlooked it to instead try and decipher the look on Hannibal's face, which seemed both mask-like and deeply pained, angry almost.

"Will," he greeted, voice as mild and friendly as ever. "Please, sit."

"W-what-what is this…?" His head throbbed. Just using his eyes made them feel like they were being stabbed with ice picks.

"Sit."

Will obeyed instantly this time, vaguely aware that Winston had also followed the command.

"Drink this." Hannibal motioned to the whiskey. "You'll feel better."

Will groped his fingers around the glass and tossed back the liquor. It burned down his gullet and hit his empty stomach with a vengeful blaze. He licked his lips, then dragged his dirty hand over them.

“Is this real?” he asked, voice tiny and wounded. Winston came to him and rested his head in Will’s lap. Will’s hand went to his fur immediately, stroking in a rhythm that soothed both the dog and himself. Winston whined and put a paw on his thigh. Will looked down at him. Winston wasn’t Winston. The dog at his side was a black and white pit bull mix. “Bandit?” Will whispered, his body rigid with disbelief. He blinked, and the image melted away.

“You have such potential, Will.”

Will’s head snapped up. He’d forgotten Hannibal was there.

“All I ever wanted was for you to realize it. It’s a pity to see it go to waste. You were so close to your becoming I could taste it.” Hannibal crossed his legs elegantly and clasped his hands, his mannerisms cool and impersonal. Will felt severed, like an afterimage. The Hannibal he knew in private moments was gone, it seemed, but Will felt the pain of his amputation like a phantom limb. It was as if he could physically, tangibly sense Hannibal letting him go, cutting him off like a diseased appendage.

“What is this? What are you doing with–” Will gestured to the tubing and the syringes. His blurry vision focused briefly on the small dish with the clump of tissue in it. “Is-is that an ear?”

“It is,” Hannibal said.

Will’s stomach churned and swallowed down bile. “Whose ear is it?”

“It’s Abigail’s,” Hannibal told him. “I’m going to make you eat it.”
Will buried his face in his hands. “Wake up,” he pleaded with himself. “Wake up, wake up, wake up.”

“You are awake, Will. But not for long. The rohypnol in your whiskey will see to that.”

Will slowly lowered his filthy hands from his face and stared hard at Hannibal, or this version of Hannibal, so different from the one he knew intimately. “You *drugged* me?”

“Your brief clarity after the hospital stay allowed you to connect the Minnesota Shrike’s copycat to Dr. Sutcliffe and that girl who carved up her friend’s face.” Hannibal picked up one of the syringes and stabbed it into a small glass bottle, drawing liquid up from it in a careful measurement. “You are on the precipice of a truth that would take my freedom from me, possibly my life. I have no choice now but to sacrifice you to save myself. And kill the part of me that cares for you.”

“Why are you telling me this?” Will clutched at his chest, hyperventilating, tears spilling over. “W-why are you doing this? What-what are you doing to me, why—”

“I’m telling you because you won’t remember.” Hannibal’s image before his eyes was melting, going black at the edges, his voice edging away to become a distant echo. “This is painful, to be sure, but necessary. Even if you hadn’t begun to suspect, my attachment to you was bordering on weakness. You cloud my judgment, Will. You make me vulnerable.”

Hannibal got to his feet and picked up the syringe. Will's limbs were dead weight. He slumped in the chair, barely able to lift his head. Hannibal came to him and ran a gloved hand through his hair. "I will always feel a sweet ache at the memory of you," he said softly. Something flickered across his features, but the momentary warmth was doused just as swiftly.

"Don't." Will's plea was a choked half-whisper.

Hannibal plunged the needle into his throat. Will cried out and tried to pull away, but Hannibal had an iron grip on the back of his neck.

"I promise I'll come to visit," Hannibal said as the world began to slide out from under Will. He tried to speak, but couldn't, and could only watch as Hannibal's human form split away from his body, revealing an ebony man-stag that dripped with gore, eyes glowing through the gloaming light.

Everything bled into black and Will became the darkness.

..and CUT!

The scene begins again when Will awakens at the beginning of the episode, after his dream where he is hunting the stag. Hannibal has framed him, but he has no memory of what happened. He gets up to take some aspirin, and pukes up Abigail Hobbs' ear. The first thing he does is call Hannibal. Watch the scene where Hannibal arrives and enjoy some subtext. Is Hannibal upset because he thinks Will did something to Abigail Hobbs? Or is he regretting his decision to frame Will?

Note: SEASON 2 has begun! Season 2 is a new work on my dashboard!!

This ends Season 1 of Cuts Unscene. Season Two is on the way. Thank you to everyone who has read this, and especially those who left me a message here or on Wattpad or Facebook. This project has been a true, utter, and absolute joy because of your kind words and encouragement. I had no idea writing fanfiction was this rewarding. I've never done it before, and this has been an incredible experience. I can't wait to begin season 2!

...stay tuned!

Season 1 Music Playlist: https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLNbJNSh1xpVMVHCEzvKaPeTHtezJY0WpO

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!